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BRAND DEVELOPMENT OF VEGAN FOOD BRANDS

Identity, values, Consumer–Brand Identification and the effects of culture on
international brand development

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ABSTRACT

In the past few years, the vegan food industry has grown considerably. Environmental concerns, ethical considerations and health reasons have all factored in creating a demand for products called meat substitutes. Consumers have become more aware of the benefits of a plant-based diet and of the negative effects meat consumption has on the environment.

The vegan food phenomenon is a current topic, but it has not been properly researched from the perspective of the companies producing vegan food. This study aims to find how vegan food brands develop, how they create a brand identity and what role values play in brand development. Furthermore, the concept of Consumer–Brand Identification is compared to the brand development of the vegan food brands to analyse whether it explains their success. The effects of culture on the international brand development of these brands are also investigated. Together, these themes form the theoretical framework of the paper. In addition, the vegan food industry itself is examined and analysed.

Four vegan food companies were interviewed for this study. It was found that vegan brands are predominantly based on their values, which shape the brand's identity to a large extent, making a strong brand identity their main competitive strength. It was also found that the concept of Consumer–Brand Identification explains the success of these brands, as they have managed to place their attractive brand identity within the same value-based social group as their consumers, leading to a high level of identification between the consumer and the brand. The companies were found to have differing approaches to international brand development, as cultural adaptation and standardisation of the brand were both present, and some companies thought it was more important to appeal to the vegan consumer culture, while others preferred appealing to the local country's culture.

KEYWORDS: Brand development, vegan, brand identity, Consumer–Brand Identification, values

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an introduction to what this study is about. It is supposed to guide the reader through all the relevant parts of this paper and help to understand what to expect upon reading it in its entirety. In this chapter, the underlying reasons for choosing a topic such as this are explained in order to justify the study. The research question and objectives are also set, and how they are going to be answered and reached will be explained. In addition, the scope and limitations of the study are introduced.

1.1 Study background

In the past few years, the vegan food industry has grown considerably in several markets (Kantar TNS 2017; Kauppalehti 2018; The Vegan Society 2018; Kantar UK 2017). The demand for vegan food has grown, as there are more environmental and ethical concerns which have increased consumers' interest in reducing their meat consumption and adopting a more plant-based diet, thus opening the market for meat substitutes (Poore and Nemecek 2018; Packaged Facts 2017; Kantar TNS 2017). In addition, the population of the planet is growing (American Statistical Association 2015), yet at the same time, humans are damaging the environment by producing food in an unsustainable manner (Poore and Nemecek 2018). Reducing meat consumption has also been identified as the most effective way to reduce one's impact on the environment (Poore and Nemecek 2018). Because of these reasons, the topic is a very current one, and most likely will be discussed even more in the future.

However, there has not been much research on the vegan food companies producing meat substitutes. In fact, most studies related to veganism are not about the companies producing vegan food at all. Consumer behaviour and attitudes regarding diets have been studied, but consumer surveys (Foodwest 2017; Kantar TNS 2017; Kantar UK 2017; Kantar UK 2018; Kauppalehti 2018) tend to overlook the role a vegan company can play in getting the consumer to switch to a more plant-based diet in order to decrease meat consumption. This study is about how vegan food brands develop their

brand from the ground up and towards internationalisation. It would also seem that vegan consumers identify and engage strongly with vegan food brands. Thus, the study is also about what kind of role the brand can play in terms of getting the consumer to identify with the brand.

In addition to these two main points, the author of this study is a semi-vegan with an interest in companies based on values, brand development and marketing. The assumed research gap is also a factor for choosing a topic such as this, because the author of this paper feels that the more we understand the vegan food industry and the whole vegan phenomenon, the better chances it has to grow and to have a positive impact on the environment, society and health. As the author of the paper is a Finn located in the United Kingdom, statistics used in the study are mainly from Finland and the United Kingdom. In addition, the paper is written in British English.

1.2 Research question and objectives

The aim of this study is to find out how vegan food companies develop a brand, especially in terms of brand identity. Therefore, the main research question is set as:

“How do vegan food companies develop their brand?”

The main research question will be answered by first thoroughly reviewing brand development and its essential concepts, and then by comparing them to empirical evidence gathered from the interviews with the vegan brands. To help answer the main research question, four objectives have been set. They are:

1. *“How do vegan food brands develop an identity?”*
2. *“What are the underlying reasons for the emergence of the vegan food industry?”*
3. *“Does the Consumer–Brand Identification concept explain the success of the vegan food brands and how?”*
4. *“How does culture affect the internationalisation of vegan food brands?”*

The first objective is about brand identity, as it is important for any brand's development, but also because the vegan brands' identity seems to be one of their main competitive advantages. Furthermore, their brand identities should be studied also because there is reason to assume that Consumer–Brand Identification, which is partly about the relationship between a brand's identity and the consumer's identity, is a main success factor for them.

The second objective is about research on the vegan food industry as a whole, including growth figures and demographics. The main factors for the emergence of the industry are explained and analysed, because they give important background information that is needed to understand the appeal of the vegan brands. These factors are environmental concerns, ethical considerations and health reasons. In addition, the consumers' increased awareness about these issues is included.

The third object originates from the author's own observations on the vegan food phenomenon during the past few years. It would seem that vegan brands are able to engage consumers to a high degree. For example, consumers defending the brand's stance on ethical and environmental issues on social media pro bono seems to signal high engagement and identification. The Consumer–Brand Identification concept may explain this engagement. Thus, it will be first reviewed in terms of literature and then compared to empirical evidence from the interviews with the vegan brands, to find whether it is an explanation for the vegan brands' success, and how.

The fourth object is included because cultural differences affect brand development when the brand is taken to new markets. What a brand does in their home market may not apply in another market because of cultural differences and barriers. There are various reasons for this with various solutions, depending on the brand and the culture/country in question. In the context of vegan food companies, cultural preferences of eating are important. These issues are first discussed with the brands included in the study, and later analysed and compared to relevant literature.

1.3 Research method and approach

The chosen research method for this study is qualitative, as the aim of the study is to generate knowledge grounded in human experience, which is the intent of qualitative research (Sandelowski 2004). To understand the vegan food phenomenon itself and how vegan brands go on about their brand development requires in-depth understanding of the topics, for which qualitative research is the most suitable option (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008: 3). Qualitative research can also generate new insights, which is to be expected as there seems to be a research gap on vegan food companies (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008: 3).

As the main aim of the study is to find out how vegan companies develop their brand, primary data is vital. Thus, four vegan food companies were interviewed in order to gather data. This is the best way to gather first-hand knowledge, as each brand is potentially unique in its approach to brand development. Primary data related to brand identity, being an ethical brand, and the formation of the brand is particularly important for this study, as most of the data could not have been gathered from secondary sources. Part of the study was to find how the brands view themselves and how they think internally, which is something that could not have been obtained from secondary sources.

The research question and objectives changed throughout the study process, which is understandable as the topic has not been thoroughly researched yet. As more knowledge was gathered, the research changed accordingly. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008: 37), the key to success in qualitative research is the ability to formulate and reformulate the research question during the process and even at the very final stages. Formulating more specific research questions should become easier during the study process once there is more familiarity to the uniqueness of the case and the phenomenon itself (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008: 117). These views describe this research process accurately.

The theoretical framework was used to formulate questions for the four vegan brands that were then interviewed, including questions about their brand's identity and values.

The brands were also asked questions to find whether they utilise or benefit from Consumer–Brand Identification in their brand development and marketing activities. Finally, they were asked about the importance and effects of culture on brand-related decisions when internationalising, including both the local country’s culture and the vegan consumer culture.

1.4 Scope and delimitations of the study

Theoretically, the scope of the study is brand development including its main concepts. Another main concept of the study is Consumer–Brand Identification (Elbedweihiy, Jayadwardhena, Elsharnouby & Elsharnouby 2016), which is included because it may help answer the main research question. Furthermore, the vegan food industry itself is researched, as the underlying reasons for the emergence of the industry are essential when trying to understand how vegan brands go about their brand development, and whether the Consumer–Brand Identification concept explains the phenomenon. In addition, the effects of culture on international brand development of the vegan food brands are discussed.

The point of view chosen for this study is the company’s. The main reason for this is because there has not been much research on vegan companies. They make for an interesting topic to study, as their whole existence seems to be based on values and ethics, which is arguably more effective than any CSR initiative that companies decide to execute. Consumer surveys related to veganism have been conducted in several countries, but those seem to overlook the role that the company potentially plays in affecting consumer behaviour through their brand. Another reason for choosing the company’s point of view is that brand-related concepts in the literature are mostly from the same point of view.

The companies included in the study are all multinational and have operations in at least three countries. In most cases the number is from five to seven. The companies vary in size, personnel number, age and in the stage of their internationalisation. The markets in

which these companies operate in mainly include Western Europe, the Nordic countries and North-America. This is due to three of the companies originating from Finland, while one of them is from the United States.

All the companies included in the study are exclusively vegan. This means that even vegetarian companies have been excluded from the study. Similarly, large food chains that may offer vegan products, but which mostly produce and sell food derived from animals, are also excluded. These delimitations help to make the study more coherent and comparable. Another common denominator of the included companies is that they all mainly make products called meat substitutes. In other words, even though companies producing vegetables or bread may also be vegan in terms of their production process, they are not vegan in the same sense as the companies that offer meat substitutes, as they do not offer direct alternatives to meat.

1.5 Literature review

Theoretically, this thesis is an overview of brand development through an extensive literature review on the relevant aspects of branding, such as brand identity, brand authenticity and the ethical brand. The chapter about brand development starts with the basics of brand development, followed by the benefits of a strong brand, before explaining one by one the various themes within brand development. Another key concept of the study, Consumer–Brand Identification, has its own chapter, because it may offer an explanation to the success of vegan food brands. In addition, cultural implications are discussed and compared to literature in terms of how culture has affected the brands' international brand development.

1.6 Terminology

As this thesis deals with vegetarians and vegans, the terms should be explained in more detail. According to the United Kingdom's National Health Service (2017),

“vegetarians and vegans eat a diet of grains, pulses, nuts and seeds, fruit and vegetables. Vegetarians (but not vegans) also eat: dairy products and eggs. Vegetarians and vegans don't eat meat, poultry, game, fish or shellfish (such as crab or lobster) or animal by-products (such as gelatine). In addition, vegans do not eat eggs and dairy products.”

For the sake of simplicity and brevity, the word “vegan” is used as the standard throughout the thesis when referring to people who do not eat meat, even though the words “vegan” and “vegetarian” are clearly distinct and cannot be used interchangeably. In addition to vegans and vegetarians, the study often deals with flexitarians. This consumer group is much larger than either vegans or vegetarians, as flexitarianism is about primarily following a plant-based diet, but occasionally eating also meat or fish (Oxford Dictionary 2018). Additionally, a consumer group called meat reducers is discussed in the study. They are consumers who have not abandoned eating meat or dairy products, but who have acknowledged the need to reduce meat consumption because of its positive impact on the environment, animal welfare and personal health (Kantar TNS 2017).

1.7 Structure of the study

In this introductory chapter, the main research problem is identified, and the objectives and areas which are to be studied in order to answer the research problem are introduced. The key concepts and structure of the thesis are presented. In addition, background information on why the study is interesting, current and justified is presented. After the introduction chapter, the remaining parts can be divided into seven chapters, which are explained next. The structure of the study can also be viewed in Figure 1.

First, the relevant literature on brand development is reviewed in depth in order to build a solid base upon which further ideas can be set and compared to. This theoretical foundation includes themes important for this study, such as brand identity, values, brand authenticity and the ethical brand. Second, research on the vegan food industry is

introduced, including proof of its growth and the main underlying factors which have enabled its growth. Third, the Consumer–Brand Identification concept is introduced, as it may explain the success of the vegan brands. These three chapters form the theoretical framework and introduce the industry in more detail.

The fourth chapter of the study explains how the empirical research was conducted, while the fifth chapter introduces its results. In the sixth chapter those results are discussed and analysed in depth, and compared to the theoretical framework set for this study to find out how the literature on brand development relates to the interview data, whether the Consumer–Brand Identification concept is a suitable explanation for the success of the vegan food brands, and how culture affects the brands when they internationalise. Finally, the seventh chapter is a conclusion of the study as a whole.

1. INTRODUCTION	
2. THEORETICAL CHAPTERS	
Brand Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits • Vision • Identity • Culture • Ethics • Resonance 	Vegan food industry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underlying factors • Demographics • Economic growth
	Consumer–Brand Identification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value congruence • Customer-to-customer similarity • Brand attractiveness • Consequences of CBI
3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods used in the study 	4. RESEARCH RESULTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the results
5. DISCUSSION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the results 	
6. CONCLUSION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the study 	

Figure 1. Structure of the study.

2 BRAND DEVELOPMENT

Developing a strong brand is a management priority (Aaker 1991, 1996; Kapferer 2005). For most companies, it has become a key marketing priority (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Kapferer 2012). However, there is little consensus on how brands should be developed in the modern interactive marketplace (Keller 2009). Traditional approaches to branding used to put emphasis on mass media techniques, but they may not be effective in a marketplace where consumers have access to lots of information about brands, companies and products. Similarly, social media may have even replaced brand networks. (Keller 2009)

Aaker (2014) describes a brand as an organisation's promise to a customer to deliver what the brand stands for in terms of functional benefits, but **also emotional, self-expressive, and social benefits**. A brand is also a journey, an evolving relationship between the customer and the brand, based on the customer's perceptions and experiences each time when connecting to the brand. The brand is the core of this relationship and a platform for strategic options, so that in the future ongoing value for the organisation can be created. Thus, brand building is strategic, rather than tactic, meaning that the focus is on long-term value creation instead of short-term benefits, such as sales stimulation.

Aaker (2014) also describes a brand as an asset that drives strategy. This notion emerged in the late 1980s and it altered perceptions of marketing and brand management for good. It changed how brands are managed and measured, as well as the roles of market executives. Firms that adopted this idea saw brand building shift from a tactical effort (which was on the shoulders of the communications team) to an independent driver of business strategy. Tactical brand management was realised to be inadequate, and it was understood that a strategy-led brand vision (together with organisational processes and skills to implement this vision) was critically needed.

In the 1990s companies realised that brands should be perceived as an asset and began treating them as such, by nurturing and continuously reinforcing them with intangible additional values and tangible innovations through strategic brand management

(Kapferer 2012: 121). Once it was realised that brands are assets, the role of brand management changed radically. Where it used to be only tactical and reactive, it is now strategic and visionary. It has become imperative that a strategic brand vision is linked to both the current and future business strategies. Along the way brand management has also become broader, encompassing issues such as strategic market insights, the stimulation of innovation, growth strategies, brand portfolio strategies and global brand strategies. And with a strategic view, the brand needs to be managed by people high in the organisation. It is a monumental change from the emphasis being on tactical measures (for instance short-term sales) and then shifting to strategic measures of brand equity and other indicators. The guiding premise is that a strong brand can be the basis of competitive advantage and long-term profitability. (Aaker 2014)

According to Kapferer (2012: 204–205), brand management is the constant act of balancing conservation, reformation, extension and progress of a current product, and at the same time the creation of novel products and services that establish new contexts of use and expand the brand to new segments. All these acts can collectively be seen as a continuous brand development process, where the first section preserves, nourishes and reinforces the brand base, and the second part creates openings and spearheads for the future. The new products may eventually become the brand's core products, and this cycle should be managed sustainably.

According to Kapferer (2012: 1), competition is getting harder as the sources of companies' strategic competitive advantages are limited and their lifespan is becoming shorter. However, the brand is one of the long-lasting advantages and managers have acknowledged that the utmost type of loyalty is brand loyalty. Some of the companies that have formerly based their success on product brands, are now also building corporate brands in order to facilitate the impact of their actions, missions and values.

Excessive hyper-consumption creates emptiness, which creates a demand for more meaningful brands in the advanced consumer society. Brands should become cultural masters and promote ideals and target the emerging demand with more meaningful brands. A changing society generates new possibilities for brands that address a more

profound meaning, such as an ideology that resonates within the brand's target group. (Kapferer 2012: 160)

In the materialistic society of today, consumers have a need for more meaningful products and services in order to express themselves and to position their consumption on various levels of intangible values, accommodating for the desired meaning. For brands, it is necessary to connect with the consumers by offering them products that help them to express and communicate their consumer identities. Companies no longer compete only for market share, but also in the market of these values. (Kapferer 2012: 1)

2.1 Benefits of a strong brand

Hoeffler and Keller (2003) list a wide range of possible benefits for having a strong and valuable brand, such as greater customer loyalty, larger margins, increased marketing communication effectiveness, less vulnerability to competitive marketing actions and marketing crises, and improved perceptions of product performance. A company's ability to realise these benefits varies depending on their marketing skills, resources, and circumstances in the market. Competitive challenges may reduce the likelihood and nature of these branding benefits. Fickle or stubborn consumers may also inhibit brand value generation. However, when individual consumers or companies consider choices between different products and services, brands matter. Thus, the quality of brand management matters to the company. (Keller 2009)

A primary brand building goal is to build, enhance or leverage brand equity (Aaker 2014). To build a strong brand, the right knowledge structure must exist in the minds of the actual or prospective customers, so that they are able to respond positively to marketing activity. The marketing communications of the company can play a crucial role in shaping that knowledge. Simultaneously, increased marketing communication effectiveness is a key benefit of developing a strong brand. If brand equity is strong, consumers may be more willing to buy into the brand's marketing message, process the

communications more favourably, and recall the communications or the accompanying cognitive or affective reactions better afterwards. Therefore, having strong brand equity is essential to the effectiveness of marketing communications. (Keller 2009)

2.2 Brand vision

According to Kapferer (2012: 121), the first principle in brand management is to have a powerful, big idea or vision. Aaker (2014) argues that a brand vision should go beyond functional benefits, i.e. the product itself. The brand vision should aim for a higher purpose: a brand personality, and emotional, social and self-expressive benefits. Brands gain strength from financial and human capital, but according to Kapferer (2012: 32), they receive their true energy from their vision and brand ideals, driven by an intensive internal motivation. This notion of brand vision is followed throughout this paper, and it specifically focuses on the emotional, social and self-expressive benefits the customer will obtain from the brand.

According to Stengel's Ideal Tree framework (2011), which is based on a ten-year growth study of 50,000 brands, a strong brand vision powers companies and enables them to grow beyond their competition. This company vision can also be called the brand ideal, which is a company's shared goal of making people's lives better. It is also the quintessential reason why the company exists, and answers the most important question: why? Stengel argues that it is the only durable way of recruiting, uniting and inspiring people (employees and consumers alike) and all the stakeholders the brand interacts with. Stengel's reasoning is that the brand is the only force that connects people's core beliefs inside the company with the values of its customers. As a result, a company without a brand ideal or vision cannot truly prosper. (Stengel 2011: 7–8)

Kapferer's (2012: 33) brand system pyramid (Figure 2) exemplifies how a brand vision should be a priority for brand managers. Brand vision and its purpose is placed at the top of the pyramid, and it encompasses the essence, values and idea of the brand's products. These are often expressed with a slogan. The second level of the pyramid is

about the overall type of the brand's communication, where the aim is to convey the brand's personality to potential customers. The brand's personality should reflect its character accordingly. The third level entails the key benefits and attributes the brand offers, while the bottom level is where the products finally come in, and they are positioned to their appropriate segments. The customer initially pays attention to the product itself, but in order to increase the product's appeal, an attractive vision ought to be in place. In other words, the customer's brand perception process goes from bottom to up. Conversely, the brand management process goes from up to bottom, starting with the brand vision. (Kapferer 2012: 33–34)

Unsurprisingly, these two opposing ways of thinking about the brand may cause conflict regarding the perception of the brand. The brand managers may have a very different view on the brand compared to the customers, which can cause confusion and result in the marketing message not being conveyed properly. This may be due to simply poor marketing, or the brand vision itself may not be strong and attractive enough for the target group. The customers may receive and understand the message only in terms of the tangible product itself and the “deeper meaning” of the brand never occurs to them. It is also possible for them to misinterpret the message or simply ignore it, because of lack of resonance with them. This does not necessarily mean that the company is unsuccessful. However, there is a lot of proof that a strong brand vision benefits the company. The best brand visions penetrate the whole organisation and resonate throughout the brand system pyramid, which creates solid ground for the management to develop the brand further. (Kapferer 2012: 34)

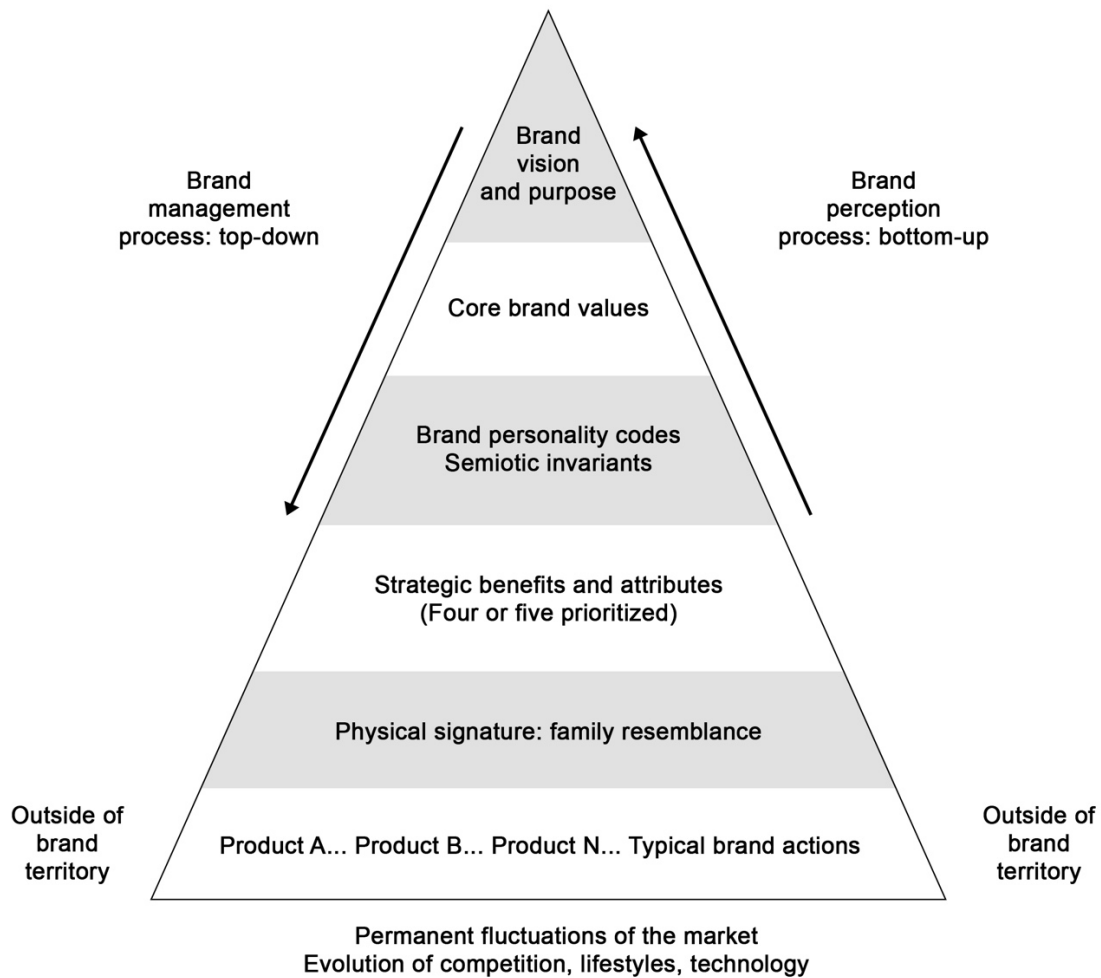


Figure 2. The brand system (Kapferer 2012: 33).

Another way to analyse brand vision is through the Ideal Tree framework. Brand ideal as a concept essentially works the same way as brand vision. According to the Ideal Tree framework, brand ideals drive the performance of the highest growth businesses, and these brand ideals are centred in one of the five fields of core human values: eliciting joy, enabling connection, inspiring exploration, evoking pride and impacting society. It is also argued that the highest growth companies are led by “business artists” and leaders who mainly communicate via the brand ideal. They distinguish themselves in generating and maintaining business growth by discovering a specific brand ideal in one (or more) of the core human values, build the business culture around the ideal, and communicate the ideal both internally and externally to engage people to deliver nearly

perfect customer experience. Business development and employees are then evaluated against this ideal. Together, these steps are the foundation of Stengel's brand ideal framework, which can be utilised to leverage the brand ideal and to enhance the growth of the business. (Stengel 2011: 37–59)

2.3 Brand identity

In order to give the customer something to relate to, the brand must have an identity. Kapferer (2012: 158) depicts brand identity as a prism (Figure 3) that consists of six facets, which should be carefully intertwined and aligned. The contents of these six facets are the internal and external qualities and features a brand should aim to communicate to its potential customers. If done successfully, the brand should become more powerful in the minds of the customers, which, in turn, should result in creating a consistent and long-lasting impression of the brand. The most relevant facets for this paper are examined next.

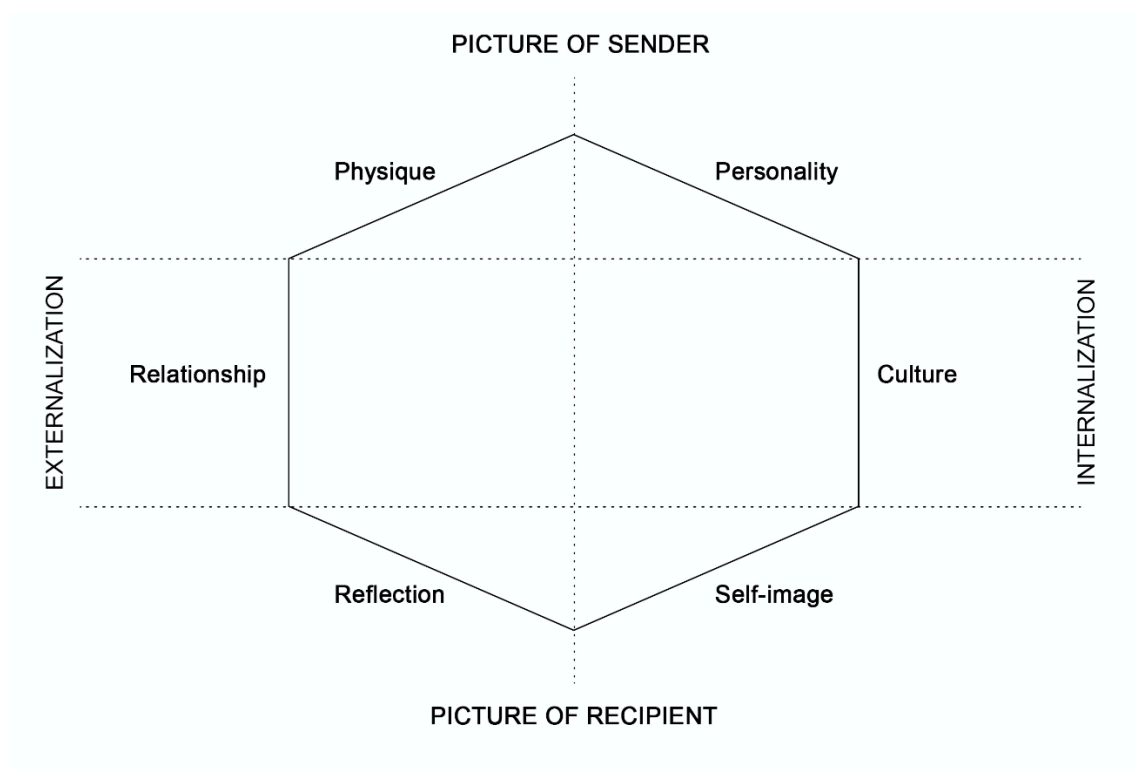


Figure 3. Brand identity prism (Kapferer 2012: 158)

The fundamental idea of the brand identity prism is that brands have the ability to speak and the only way they can successfully exist is if they are able to communicate. As brands talk about and promote the products that embody their essence, they can be analysed as a form of communication or speech. A message always has a sender, and regardless of whether the subject is a product or a service, the communication constructs an image of its sender and facilitates a message to its receiver. Brand communication is a building process, because brands have no actual senders. The personality and physique facets of the prism facilitate the definition of the sender, which is fabricated for a specific purpose. (Kapferer 2012: 163)

The prism is divided vertically into two. On the left are the facets for reflection, relationship and physique, which are the visible, social facets that issue the brand its outbound expression. On the right are the facets for culture, self-image and personality, which are the intrinsic facets of the brand encompassed within the “soul” of the brand. (Kapferer 2012: 163)

The first facet of the brand identity prism is the brand’s physique. Brands have physical qualities, which are a combination of objective characteristics and progressive features. The physique of the brand is its backbone, but also its tangible added value, as the initial step in brand development is the definition of the brand’s physical aspect. It defines concretely what the brand is, what its product does and how it looks. Additionally, the brand physique facet encompasses the brand’s “prototype” (sometimes known as the flagship product), which represents the qualities of the brand and is a prime example of the brand’s product. Some brands encounter problems with their physical facet, because their functional added value is inadequate. Even image-based brands must provide material benefits. Thus, brands can be seen as “two-legged value-adding systems”. (Kapferer 2012: 158–159)

Brand identity’s second facet is personality. Brands incrementally build their character through communication, by establishing the brand’s personality and the manner in which it speaks about its products. By doing this, the brand reveals what type of person it would be if it were a human being. Brand personality is measured and characterised by human personality qualities relevant for brands. It fills a psychological function by

allowing customers to identify with the brand or project themselves into it. To large extent, brand personality defines the style of advertising of the brand. This quest for personality is why brands often decide to use a spokesperson (which may be fictional) to promote the brand. (Kapferer 2012: 159)

Culture is the next facet of the brand identity prism. Powerful brands are more than mere products, benefits, or personality traits – they are ideologies and visions of the world. For a brand's identity, the cultural facet is paramount, as remarkable brands are not only powered by their culture, but also disseminate their culture to their customers. Shared values, causes, ideas and ideals bring people together. An inspiring ideology is what keeps customers interested long term and differentiates the brand from competition. (Kapferer 2012: 159–160)

Another facet of the prism is customer reflection. When customers are asked about their perceptions of specific brands, they usually answer according to the brand's perceived customer type, which is due to brands establishing their communication and products. Albeit brands attempt to construct a reflection of the customer they want to target, they often fail, as they mix up two things – the real customer and the perceived customer. Brands confuse the two, and end up constructing a reflection of the customers as they are. Instead, customers should be reflected as how they wish to be perceived when consuming a certain brand. By doing this, customers are provided with a model to identify with. Customers build their identities by using brands, which gives them an additional benefit, which, in turn, is a significant way for brands to create value for their customers. (Kapferer 2012: 161–162)

Self-image is another facet of the brand identity prism, and it functions as the customer's inner mirror. Based on the attitude the customer has towards a given brand they build a specific type of internal relationship with themselves, which influences their purchasing behaviour. While promoting the brand they have chosen, customers pledge loyalty by showing their thinking and self-image, which generates conversation with other customers. Along with the aforementioned facets, the self-image facet determines the identity of any given brand and the boundaries within which it is able to transform and evolve. In the brand identity prism, all six facets are interconnected and

form a well-organised ensemble, as the contents of each facet resonate with each other. (Kapferer 2012: 162–163)

The brand's communication also develops a recipient, which is the target audience of the communication. The definition of the recipient is facilitated by the self-image and reflection facets of the prism. However, there may be a chasm between the sender (the brand) and the recipient (the target audience). This chasm is reduced by the culture and relationship facets of the prism. (Kapferer 2012: 163)

Brand identity projects the facets of a brand's long-term desirability and particularity, which is why it must be brief, exciting and rigorous. Strong brand identity prisms are characterised by having only few words on each facet and having different words on each of them. All the words are also powerful and meaningful, as the brand's identity is what makes it stick out from its competition. (Kapferer 2012: 164)

Conversely, weak brand identity prisms are full of brand image qualities stemming from the latest surveys on consumer behaviour and there is redundancy and incoherence between the facets. Each facet of the prism represents its own unique dimension of the brand, and mixing them up decreases the distinctiveness of the brand. Additionally, in weak brand identity prisms the chosen terms aim for consensus instead of edginess, leading to an uninspiring brand. (Kapferer 2012: 164)

2.4 Brand culture

Brand culture is imperative in developing a brand with an identity for the customers to relate with. For a brand to become truly remarkable, it ought to have strong brand culture among its customers, but the brand should also disseminate its own culture to its customers. Shared values, causes, ideas and ideals bring people together, which creates brand culture. This can be reached by developing an inspiring ideology for the brand, which will attract customers similar to each other and the brand. (Kapferer 2012: 159–160)

According to Jeanes (2013), most developments in the field of branding are based on case studies of big brands (Kay 2006) and tend to focus on brands as part of management in general (Kornberger 2010) from a corporate point of view, namely the decisions of senior management to make the organisation's identity and attributes known in the form of a clearly defined brand proposition (Balmer 2001: 281). However, a growing body of literature challenges the corporate-based view on brands, and instead focuses on the role of consumers in shaping the brand (Jeanes 2013). Its focus is on the relationship between the consumer and the brand, and, more specifically, how consumers use brands to give meaning to their lives and form part of their identity (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Fournier 1998; Holt 2002, 2004; Humphreys and Grayson 2008). This view is exemplified by the emergence of brand communities (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Fournier and Lee 2009; Luedicke 2006; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001).

Fournier and Lee (2009) describe brand communities as the "owner of the brand". This is because brand communities by their interest in the brand have both loyalty towards it, but also vested interest in ensuring the brand remains true to its values (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Brand communities can be seen as acting guardians of the brand's legitimacy (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Therefore, brand communities can be both challenging and useful for the brand's managers (Jeanes 2013).

Employees may also play an important role in developing a brand. The brand should be developed internally as well as externally, because the brand will only deliver on the brand promise if the employees believe in the brand values and act accordingly in all customer touchpoints. The idea that the brand is an asset must be included in the company's internal communication as well, in order to generate first understanding and then buy-in within the company. (Aaker 2014)

Ideally, employees should authentically live the brand values by demonstrating their personal involvement, pride, and engagement in communicating the brand promise to customers (Morhart, Herzog & Tomczak 2009: 123). This would be beyond the employees merely aligning with the brand values (Borgerson, Schroeder, Magnusson &

Magnusson 2009). This can be accomplished through the employees' consumption or their lifestyle, for instance leisure activities, activism etc. (Jeanes 2013).

2.5 Ethical brand

As this paper examines brands in the vegan food industry, where ethics are very close to every brand's core, moral or ethical brands should be explained. Jeanes (2013) describes a moral brand as a brand that communicates moral or ethical issues through its brand culture. If a brand's values become the organisational culture, it is a brand culture in which agents external to the organisation, such as brand communities, have an immediate involvement in its creations. In this kind of brand culture managers and employees are often required to embody the brand values. Brand cultures ought to be understood in their socio-economic, historical and political contexts in terms of their creation, embodiment and attributed meaning. (Jeanes 2013)

Moral brands are especially influenced by the moral and ethical issues of the day. A moral brand culture can be identified by its tendency to be born and lived collectively within and beyond the conventional organisational boundaries, i.e. managers and employees co-create the culture with brand communities. Furthermore, it can be identified by the nature and intensity of the morals, debates and concerns of the time, which are reflected upon the brand culture. (Jeanes 2013)

Balmer (2001) argues that brands (like identities) are seen from a functionalist (i.e. manageable), socially constructed, and post-modern perspective (as a consequence of power relationships), although typically not simultaneously. Based on this view, Jeanes (2013) suggests that a brand should be understood as socially constructed, but in which identity exists as well, which reflects the dominance of some interests over others in the creation of the brand. Brand identity can, however, be heavily influenced by managers by focusing on organisational history, storytelling, and symbolic behaviours (Hatch and Schultz 2003), which is why their role in managing the brand and controlling behaviour should not be overlooked (Jeanes 2013).

2.6 Brand knowledge

According to the customer-based brand equity model by Keller (2001, 2008), brand equity is fundamentally determined by the brand knowledge in the minds of the consumers created by the brand, by marketing activities. More specifically, customer-based brand equity is defined as the differential effect consumer knowledge about a brand has on their customers' response to the marketing of said brand (Keller 2009). Furthermore, according to Aaker (2014), a primary brand development goal is to build, enhance or leverage brand equity. The major dimensions of brand equity are brand awareness, brand associations, and loyalty of the customer base.

Based on this view, brand knowledge is more than simply the facts about the brand. Instead, it is all the thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, and experiences that consumers link with the brand. They can be thought as a set of associations with the brand in the consumers' memory. Thus, the premise of the customer-based brand equity model is that the power of a brand resides in the minds of its customers. (Keller 2009)

Brand knowledge has two important components: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness means the strength of the brand in the mind and memory of the consumer. Similarly, brand image is the consumers' perception of and preference for a brand, which are determined by the various types of brand associations in the consumers' memory. Unique, favourable and strong brand associations are essential for the brand, because they are likely to differentiate it from competitors. Consequently, these may become sources for brand equity and drive differential effects, which include enhanced loyalty, greater communication and channel effectiveness, and growth opportunities. Brand equity provides a common denominator for interpreting marketing strategies and assessing the value of a brand. (Hoeffler and Keller 2003; Keller 2008; Keller 2009)

2.7 Brand resonance

Brand resonance is closely linked with brand equity. It means the intensity or depth of the psychological bond customers have with a brand. In addition, it is the level of activity engendered by loyalty towards the brand. Certain product or service categories have by definition high levels of interest and thus allow more resonance inherently. The more specific the product or service, the more it potentially resonates with customers. (Keller 2009)

According to Keller (2009), brand resonance can be divided into four dimensions, each capturing several different aspects of brand loyalty:

1. Behavioural loyalty – customers’ repeated purchases and the amount/share of category volume attributed to the brand. In other words, how often do customers purchase the brand and how much?
2. Attitudinal attachment – customers viewing the brand as something special in a broader context. Do the customers “love” the brand, describe it as one of their favourite possessions/habits, and do they view the brand as something to look forward to?
3. Sense of community – customers feeling a kinship or affiliation with other people associated with the brand. Do customers interact with fellow brand users or representatives of the company, and does this interaction occur online or offline?
4. Active engagement – customers being willing to invest personal resources on the brand (time, money, energy, etc.) beyond what it takes to simply acquire the product. Do the customers choose to join a club or similar with a focus on the brand, do they want to receive updates or engage in conversation with people associated with the brand, and do they visit websites related to the brand?

According to Keller (2001), brand resonance can be analysed and measured by using the customer-based brand equity model (CBBE), which addresses more specifically how brands ought to be built in terms of consumer knowledge structures. Brand resonance is only one part of the pyramid, but it is arguably the ultimate goal of building a brand, which is why it is at the top of the pyramid.

According to the CBBE model, brand building can be viewed as an ascending series of steps (Figure 4). From bottom to top, they are:

1. Identity – ensuring the brand’s identification with customers and the customers’ association of the brand with a specific product class or customer need
2. Meaning – establishing the totality of brand meaning firmly in the minds of customers by strategically linking tangible and intangible brand associations
3. Response – evoking proper customer responses in terms of brand-related judgment and feelings
4. Relationships – converting customer responses to the brand into intense, active and loyal relationship between them

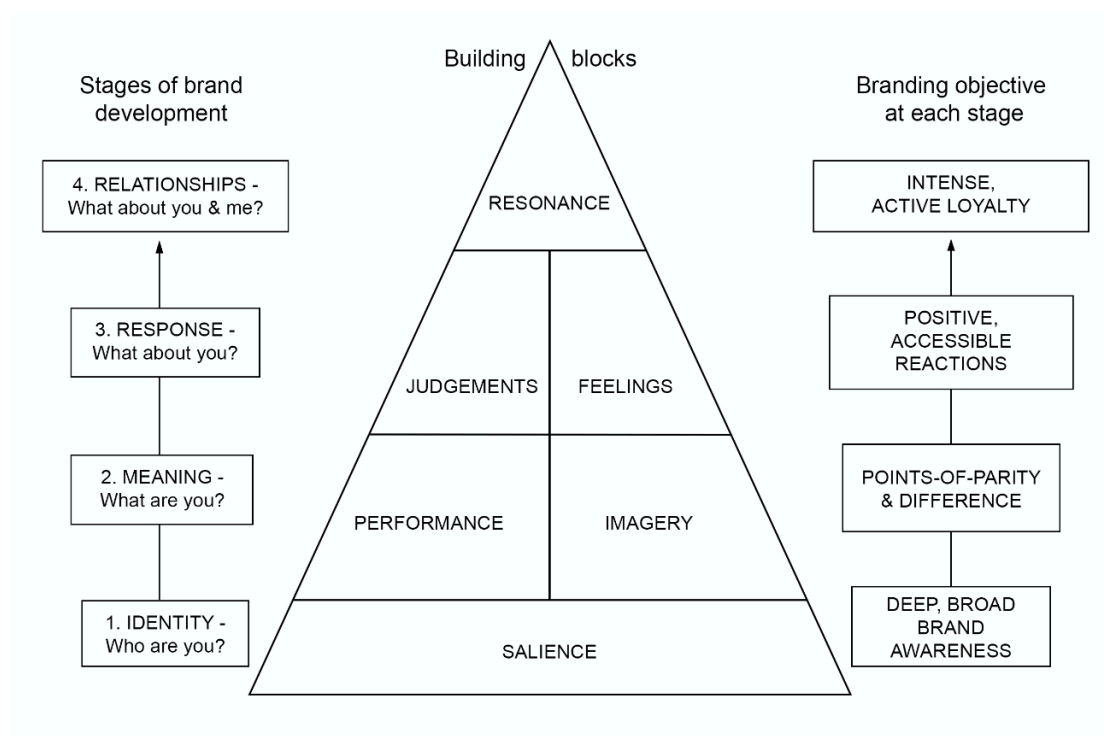


Figure 4. The customer-based brand equity model pyramid (Keller 2001).

In order to enact the four steps, a pyramid of six “brand building blocks” must be established with the customers. As can be seen in Figure 4, the CBBE model emphasises the duality of brands. The left side of the pyramid is the rational route to brand building, while on the right side is the emotional route. In order to create significant brand equity, the brand resonance block at the top of the pyramid must be reached by first putting into place all the right building blocks below it. (Keller 2009)

The following is a breakdown of all the building blocks of the CBBE model by Keller (2009):

1. Brand salience – how easily and often customers think about the brand when facing a purchasing decision.
2. Brand performance – how well the product or service fulfils its promise to meet customers’ functional needs.
3. Brand imagery – the external properties of the product or service. This also includes the brand’s attempts to meet the customers’ psychological or social needs.
4. Brand judgment – how customers evaluate the brand
5. Brand feelings – the emotional responses and reactions regarding the brand
6. Brand resonance – the nature of the relationship between the brand and the customers, and to which extent they feel “in sync” with the brand

Based on the CBBE model, brand resonance is most likely to result when marketers have first been able to create proper salience and breadth and depth of awareness of the brand. In addition, they ought to have firmly established points-of-difference and points-of-parity, and created positive judgments and feelings to appeal to the head and the heart of the customer. Once a firm foundation has been put into place, marketers can optimise the four dimensions of brand resonance by numerous marketing communications activities, which often affect more than one dimension of resonance. (Keller 2009)

Brand resonance can be analysed in more detail by using the brand resonance network model (Figure 5), which depicts four key relationships that influence the four

dimensions of brand resonance. While the most important relationship in the network from the marketer's perspective may be between the consumer and the brand, relationships among consumers, between consumers and the company, and between the company and the brand have become increasingly important, as they strongly influence the main relationship, namely consumer–brand relationship. Therefore, managing all these relationships becomes of primary importance. (Keller 2009)

The following is a short consideration on how each of these relationships can be analysed: (Keller 2009)

1. Consumer–Company relationship: what do consumers know about the company behind the brand, have they heard about it and how do they feel about it?
2. Consumer–Consumer relationship: how much do consumers interact with each other, how do they learn from each other, and how do they express their loyalty and observe the loyalty of others?
3. Company–Brand relationship: is the company viewed as a good advocate for the brand, ensuring that it lives up to its promise, delivers on consumer expectations and exhibits proper brand values in the marketplace?
4. Consumer–Brand relationship: how much and often do consumers use the brand, and how attached they are to it?

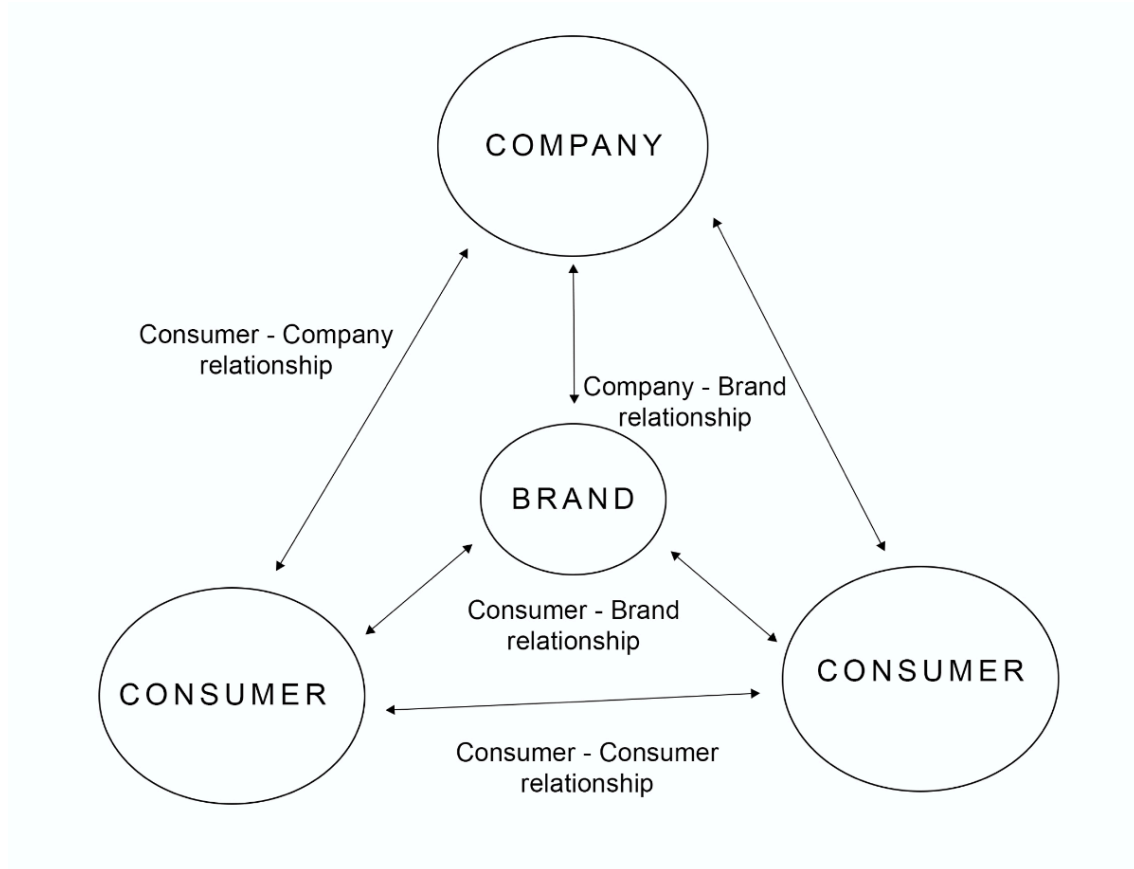


Figure 5. The brand resonance network (Keller 2009).

2.8 Brand authenticity

Schallehn, Burmann and Riley (2014) define brand authenticity as the degree to which brand identity is causally linked to brand behaviour. Brand authenticity is perceived when a brand fulfils its brand promise in a consistent, continuous and unique way. Its purpose is to build trust between the brand and the customer.

The benefits of having an authentic brand can go beyond the relationship between the brand and the customer. Brands that can tap into the imagination of their customers can also inspire those within the organisation. This can be very effective especially when the values seem to be moral, for instance those pertaining to social and environmental responsibility. Another possibility is when a brand derives its legitimacy from being

“marginal” compared to most brands in the marketplace. (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Schau, Muñiz Jr, & Arnould 2009)

The credibility of a brand can also be enhanced by giving more attention to its whole production process, which can include sourcing from ethical and sustainable supplies of ingredients, manufacturing in an environmentally sensitive manner, and minimising packaging (Jeanes 2013). According to Kornberger (2010), brand authenticity can be given more depth and substance by employee identity and activity. Like consumers, employees can become branded and shaped according to the brand's values. Therefore, branding is not only an external exercise, but can also play a key role inside the organisation. In brand culture, the brand and culture become intertwined, inextricably related and mutually constitutive, which can lead to a more authentic brand. However, Jeanes (2013) argues that an authentic brand culture may be difficult to obtain, as true authenticity requires giving autonomy to the employees.

3 VEGAN FOOD INDUSTRY

This chapter is about the underlying reasons why and how vegan food has become such a successful phenomenon, how the industry has grown and what its future looks like. As a starting point, the growth of the world's population and the increase in disposable incomes has led to an increase in global meat consumption (de Boer, Schösler & Aiking 2014; Hallström, Rööf & Börjesson 2014). However, the high level of meat consumption has raised environmental, social and health concerns, and calls to reduce the quantity of meat we eat. This has created an ongoing global debate among policy-makers, practitioners and academics (Yadavalli and Jones 2014; Hallström et al. 2014). This debate has several facets, some of which are introduced next.

3.1 Background information

The next sub-chapters are about the underlying reasons why there is high demand for vegan/vegetarian products. According to American Statistical Association (2015), the population of the planet will reach 11 billion by the year 2100. At the same time, we know how damaging the food industry (especially the meat industry) is on the environment (Poore and Nemecek 2018). These two issues are hard to tackle at the same time, but vegan food arguably offers a solution to it.

3.2 Environmental factors

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has been critical in their reports on the ecological impact of high levels of meat consumption (Tubiello, Salvatore, Córdor Golec, Ferrara, Rossi, Biancalani & Flammin 2014). Meat products have been associated with an inefficient conversion rate of feed to meat protein, high greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and biodiversity loss (Hallström et al. 2014; Nijdam, Rood & Westhoek 2012; Defra 2013). Together, these issues have led to meat production being identified as one of the main drivers of environmental and social

pressures (Westhoek, Lesschen, Rood, Wagner, De Marco, Murphy-Bokern & Oenema 2014).

In the biggest analysis to date, researchers at Oxford University compiled data from 38,700 farms, 1,600 processors, different packaging types and retailers, and concluded that avoiding meat and dairy products is the single most efficient way to reduce one's impact on the environment. This includes not only reducing greenhouse gases, but also global acidification, eutrophication, land use and water use. For instance, producing 100g of beef results in up to 105kg of greenhouse gases, while 100g of tofu can be produced with only 3,5kg of greenhouse gases. Similarly, in order to yield the same amount of protein, producing even the lowest impact beef results in six times more greenhouse gases and requires 36 times more land when compared to peas. Furthermore, more than 80% of farmland is used up by livestock, yet it produces only 18% of calories and 37% of protein. This poor nutritional return from all the resources that are used in producing it is one of the main reasons why meat production should be avoided if considering one's impact on the environment. (Poore and Nemecek 2018)

3.3 Health factors

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (the cancer agency of the World Health Organization) has classified the consumption of red meat (especially processed meat) as carcinogenic to humans (IARC 2015). In the United Kingdom, the Department of Health (2011) reported that meat consumption should drop by approximately 70% from an average 226 grams per day for men and 163 grams for women, to about 70 grams per person per day to reach healthy levels (Westland and Crawley 2012). High levels of meat consumption have also been associated with health conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer (Troy and Kerry 2010; Olmedilla-Alonso, Jiménez-Colmenero & Sánchez-Muniz 2013). In addition, high meat consumption is also linked to the global obesity epidemic (Vergnaud, Norat, Romaguera, Mouw, May, Travier & Couto 2010), which affects a fifth of the world's adult population (Sofi, Abbate, Gensini & Casini 2010).

Conversely, a plant-based diet has been confirmed to support healthy living in people of all ages (British Dietetic Association 2017). The American Dietetic Association (2009) states that appropriately planned vegetarian or vegan diets are healthy, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in preventing and treating of certain diseases. A plant-based diet is appropriate for athletes, during pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood and adolescence (American Dietetic Association 2009). The Finnish Food Safety Authority Evira also states a carefully planned vegan diet is beneficial for health in all ages (Evira 2018). The health concerns associated with meat and the health benefits that a plant-based diet confirmedly has are being noticed, as more attention is placed on understanding the benefits of diets based less on meat and more on plant proteins, to effectively reduce meat consumption or develop policies and strategies for meat substitution (Hallström et al. 2014; de Boer et al. 2014).

3.4 Ethical factors

The ethical nature of the vegan food industry should also be examined, as it is a major reason why people decide to drop meat from their diets (Foodwest 2017). Various animal rights organisations such as PETA claim that breeding animals for food is unethical and should be avoided (PETA 2018). Especially industrial farming is considered by some as “one of the worst crimes in history”, because it disregards the subjective needs of the animal in question before slaughtering, which is often carried out with considerable pain inflicted upon the animal. (Harari 2015; PETA 2018)

According to Harari (2014: 102–109), what makes industrial farming and the whole existence of domesticated farm animals particularly cruel is not just the way in which they die, but even more importantly how they live. Objectively, the animal receives care, protection from predators, treatment for diseases, food and water and from humans. In this sense, it can be said that domesticated farm animals are better off than their counterparts in the wild in terms of reproduction. Nevertheless, humans cause suffering to them in other ways, and the root of the problem is in evolutionary psychology. Domesticated animals have inherited from their ancestors many physical,

emotional and social needs, which have become redundant on modern farms. Especially the separation of the mother from its offspring makes both suffer greatly, yet they live on and multiply.

Darwinian evolution maintains that all instincts and drives of any animal have evolved in order to make the animal more likely to survive and reproduce. Based on this view, the continuous reproduction of farm animals (and their success in terms of numbers) asserts that all their real needs are met. However, evolution is a very slow process, and a need shaped thousands of generations ago continues to be felt subjectively, even if it is no longer necessary for survival and reproduction in the present. Even though a young farm animal has all its objective needs taken care of, it continues to feel its subjective needs, such as the urge to bond with its mother and playing with its fellow offspring. Industrial farming does not allow these urges to be fulfilled, and so the animal suffers. Collectively, domesticated farm animals are the most successful animals in the world, but at the same time they constantly suffer individually. (Harari 2014: 102–109)

3.5 Increased awareness

People have become more aware of all the issues mentioned related to meat production and consumption. Ever since the internet became available to a large portion of the world's population, more information has become accessible to more people on any topic. It is likely that it has also played a part in why more and more people either quit eating meat completely, or decide to reduce their meat consumption. People are no longer ignorant on these issues. These developments have created a demand for food products made without meat. There are now social, environmental, health, and ethical demands for vegan or vegetarian products. (Apostolidis and McLeay 2016)

3.6 A growing industry

Apostolidis and McLeay (2016) argue that due to these developments, there may be potential for using meat substitutes to encourage less meat-based lifestyles. This could offer promising opportunities for reducing the social, environmental and economic impact of consumer diets (de Bakker and Dagevos 2012). These opportunities and potential have already become reality, as can be seen when examining the growth of the vegan food industry.

There are several ways to measure the growth of the vegan food industry. Firstly, there are several surveys on the percentage and demographics of vegetarians and vegans among all people, which can then be used to measure the growth of the industry. Secondly, several vegan food companies have reported their growth figures, which is definite proof of the growth that has taken place. Growth figures are also arguably more reliable than surveys where people are asked how they identify in terms of diet. Thirdly, there are several opinion polls about the attitudes regarding veganism and vegetarianism, which give insights on the changing opinion about vegan and vegetarian food in general. The following chapters are about these growth indicators.

3.7 Demographics

According to Kantar UK (2017), 1% of the population of the United Kingdom identifies as vegan, and 28% as vegetarian, lacto-vegetarian, ovo-vegetarian or lacto-ovo-vegetarian (see Figure 6). By contrast, only 2% of the population of the United Kingdom were vegetarians in 2012, according to the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (2012). A 2018 study by the Vegan Society estimates the number of vegans in Great Britain (i.e. not the whole United Kingdom) to be approximately 600,000, which is 1,16% of the population of Great Britain. According to the same study, the number of vegans in Great Britain has quadrupled between 2014 and 2018. Based on these data, the industry is growing not only rapidly, but steadily as well (The Vegan Society 2018).

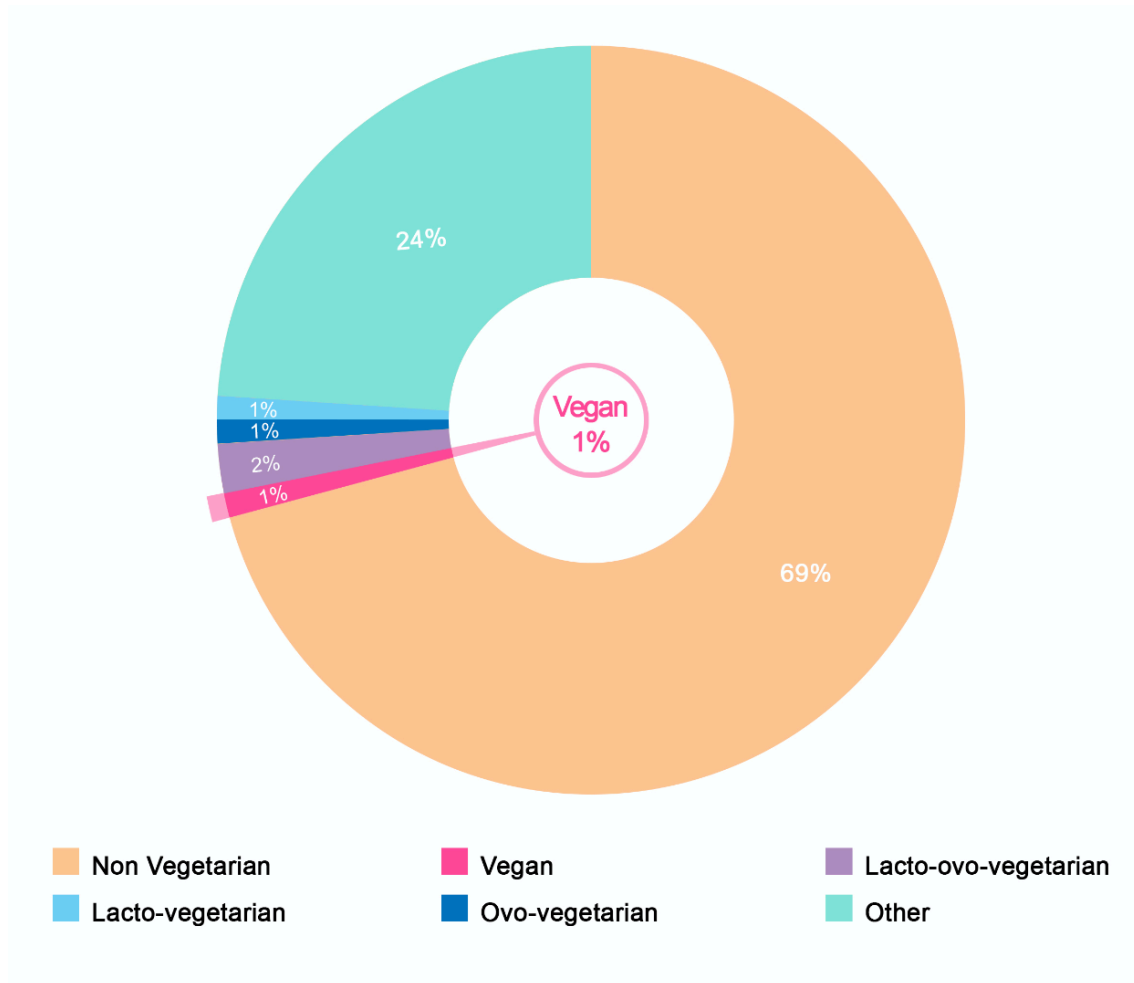


Figure 6. Diets in the United Kingdom shown in percentages (Kantar UK 2017).

According to Kantar TNS (2017), 6% of the adult population of Finland is vegetarian, while 2% is vegan. However, 39% of the population has increased the percentage of plants in their diet in the past 6 months. This may explain why, despite the growth of the vegan food industry, the overall percentage of vegetarians and/or vegans has not risen, why the consumption of red meat has not decreased, and why poultry consumption has risen. Kantar TNS (2017) also reports that reducing red meat consumption is particularly on the rise in the age groups under 30-year-olds (40%) and 30–45-year-olds (33%).

According to Koistinen, Pouta, Heikkilä, Forsman-Hugg, Kotro, Mäkelä & Niva (2013), meat eating segments are male-dominated, while the healthier and more sustainable consumer segments are reported to be mostly female and dominated by younger

consumers. A 2016 survey by The Vegan Society confirms that in the United Kingdom 63% of vegans were female and only 37% male. They also report that students are six times more likely to follow a vegan or vegetarian diet than their parents, and that almost half of all vegans (41%) are in the youngest age group in the survey, 15–34-year-olds. By contrast, only 14% of all vegans are in the over 65 age group. These data suggest even more growth in the future. (The Vegan Society 2016)

Flexitarians are another important consumer group that should be considered, because they have had an important role on the growth of the vegan food industry. They primarily follow a vegan or vegetarian diet but occasionally eat meat or fish (Oxford Dictionary 2018). However, it seems the term flexitarian is used loosely, as it has also been described as having “no rules” (The Flexitarian 2018). According to the research by Kantar TNS (2017), in Finland the percentage of vegetarians and vegans has not increased, even though the vegetarian food industry has grown considerably. This can be explained by the effect flexitarians have had on the popularity on plant-based food, as they are by definition larger in numbers. Another group that most likely has played a role is meat reducers, who are also greater in numbers than vegetarians or vegans.

3.8 Economic growth

According to Kantar UK (2017), the dairy-free market is growing yearly by 18.3%, and has risen from 1.7% in 2013 to account for 3.4% of the total dairy market in 2017. Specifically, dairy-free cheese saw an annual growth of 80%. People opting for dairy-free products cite health as the key motivator behind their consumption. There is clear emphasis on female consumers, as women account for 64% of the total consumption in the dairy-free sector. Kantar UK (2017) also reports that 29% of evening meals in the UK now contain no meat or fish and the number of such meals is up 87 million from 2015. One in ten shoppers also bought a meat-free ready meal, causing sales to increase by 15% in a year. In addition, soya-based alternatives to yogurt are growing by 8% annually. Companies are also reporting considerable growth numbers, for example Linda McCartney, a meat free company owned by the large organic food brand Hain

Daniels Group reported an increase in sales volumes of 50% in 2014–2015 (Mintel 2015).

In an article in Kauppalehti (2018) Antti Oksa, the Vice President of Fresh Foods at SOK (S-Group in Finland) described the vegetarian food phenomenon as “exceptional” and rare in terms of how big and quick the change has been. According to Oksa, the change is also permanent. Several plant-based products of S-Group doubled their sales in 2017 (Kauppalehti 2018). According to Oksa, S-Group sold oat-based beverages 56% more than the previous year. In addition, the sales of pulled oats (nyhtökaura), Härkis (similar meat substitute made mainly of fava beans) and other similar plant protein food tripled during 2017 (Kauppalehti 2018).

Innova Market Insights (2016) reports that a 60% rise in the number of global food and beverage launches using a vegetarian claim has taken place between 2011 and 2015. Similarly, product launches using the term “vegan” rose to account 4.3% of total introductions in 2015, which is up from 2.8% in 2014 and 1.5% in 2012. In addition, globally meat substitute launches grew on average 24% annually between 2011 and 2015.

3.9 Vegan/vegetarian products

According to Schösler, de Boer and Boersema (2012) and de Bakker and Dagevos (2012), an effective approach to decreasing meat consumption may be a partial replacement of meat with plant-based substitutes, because consumers may be more willing to accept a food product being substituted in their diets, rather than change their meal patterns. While a vegetarian diet can be compiled by simply leaving out meat, the novelty of the vegetarian food phenomenon (at least in the eyes of the bigger audience) is the emergence of products called meat substitutes. They are plant-based meat alternative products that aim to look, taste and feel like meat. They are usually made from soy beans (tofu and tempeh), mycoprotein (quorn), grains (seitan and pulled oats) or other plant proteins. Some products are a combination of these ingredients. They are

made to resemble meat in taste and texture in the form of, for example, steaks, stir fry cubes, mince or sausages. (Apostolidis and McLeay 2016).

Several studies report that meat substitutes have a lower ecological footprint in terms of carbon footprint, land use and energy use (Nijdam et al. 2012; Poore and Nemecek 2018). Meat substitutes produced from vegetables or grains are more carbon efficient, have a lower fat content, less salt, require less water for production and less land when compared to red meat products (Nijdam et al. 2012; Hoek, Luning, Weijzen, Engels, Kok & de Graaf 2011).

According to Poore and Nemecek (2018), beef results in up to 105 kilos of greenhouse gases per 100g of meat, whereas tofu produces less than 3,5kg. Therefore, it is no wonder meat substitute products are perceived by some consumers as having a healthier image than meat (Elzerman, van Boekel & Luning 2013). The consumption of these meat substitutes is increasingly popular among vegetarians and meat reducers who actively seek to reduce their meat consumption (van Dooren, Marinussen, Blonk, Aiking & Vellinga 2014).

3.10 Future of the vegan food industry

According to the Vegan Society (2018), the vegan movement is being driven by young consumers making more ethical choices, as almost half (41%) of all vegans are in the 15–34 age category. Conversely, over 65-year-olds form only 14% of vegans, which seems to indicate growth in vegan diets in the future. NPD Group (2016) reports that younger consumers are driving growth of fresh and frozen vegetable consumption, as millennials and Gen Z are adopting fresh vegetables as part of their diet at a much earlier stage than previous generations and have increased their fresh vegetable intake by 52% over the last decade. Consequently, NPD Group forecasts a 10% increase in vegetable consumption as the younger generations enter their heaviest consumption years.

In 2018, the meat substitutes market is estimated at 4.64 billion USD globally. However, it is projected to reach 6.43 billion USD by 2023 with a compound annual growth rate of 6,8% (Markets and Markets 2018). According to the same report, the main drivers for growth of the meat substitute industry are public awareness of increasing obesity levels as a result of high meat consumption, and the perceived social and environmental concerns associated with high meat consumption, such as the carbon footprint of the meat industry.

4 CONSUMER–BRAND IDENTIFICATION

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the concept of Consumer–Brand Identification, along with its several themes. This is because one of the aims of this study is to find out whether Consumer–Brand Identification explains why vegan brands are successful. In the discussion chapter of the study this topic is revisited to analyse the research question about vegan brands and Consumer–Brand Identification.

Consumer–Brand Identification (henceforth referred to as CBI) is defined by Elbedweihi et al. (2016) as the perceived overlap between one’s own self-concept and the brand’s identity. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003: 76) describe CBI as “the primary psychological substrate for that kind of deep, committed, and meaningful relationships that marketers are increasingly seeking to build with their customers”. According to Elbedweihi et al. (2016), it may be a useful construct in understanding the underlying mechanisms which explain the relationship between consumers and brands. The results of Elbedweihi et al. (2016) indicate that **value congruence**, **customer-to-customer similarity**, and **brand attractiveness** play different but positively significant roles in influencing consumers' identification, which is significant for this study.

The theoretical foundation of identification in marketing literature is primarily based on the social identity theory (Lam 2012). Based on this theory, Tajfel and Turner (1985) argue that, in addition to personal identity, social identity is an essential part of one’s self-concept. An individual’s social identity derives from the social entities to which they belong, such as demographic groups, educational institutions or occupations. Individuals tend to simplify their social world by classifying themselves and others into various social groups. Social categorisation such as this allows individuals to cognitively segment the social environment and provides them with a way to define themselves and others. Escalas and Bettman (2003) find that the need for self-verification, which is the consumer’s willingness to form enduring relationships with brands that validates and verifies who they are (Swann 1983), steers customers to form connections with brands associated with reference groups congruent with their concept of self.

Brands can be the social group for the consumers to categorise and identify themselves with (Elbedweihy et al. 2016). One's self-concept can be verified and maintained by brand associations, in which the brand can play a significant role (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998), as privately consumed products can contribute to and reflect people's identity (Berger and Heath 2007; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan 1993).

Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) argue that with meaningful and attractive social identities companies can partially fulfil the most important self-definitional needs of consumers, deducing that these needs are thus valid targets for identification. This is in line with the views of Fournier (1998) and Holt (2002) that brands can help consumers construct and maintain their identity as sources of symbolic meaning. Research by Donavan, Janda and Suh (2006), who propose that consumers identify with brands, seems to support this view as well.

4.1 Value congruence

Consumer-brand value congruence (value congruence for short) is described by Edwards and Cable (2009) as the similarity between consumers' personal values and their perceptions of a brand's values. According to Lam, Ahearne, Mullins, Hayati and Schillewaert (2013), value congruence can help consumers fulfil their self-definitional needs for continuity or verification. Furthermore, according to Tuškej, Golob and Podnar (2013), value congruence can be controlled by brand managers through, for instance, positioning and marketing activities.

Elbedweihy et al. (2016) found that value congruence is positively related to Consumer-Brand Identification (see Figure 7). This is in line with Kuenzel and Halliday's (2008) view that self-brand congruence is a significant predictor of CBI. Elbedweihy et al. (2016) also suggest that brand managers should identify the salient determinants for enhancing identification, and thus create as much congruence as possible between the values of the target market and the brand itself.

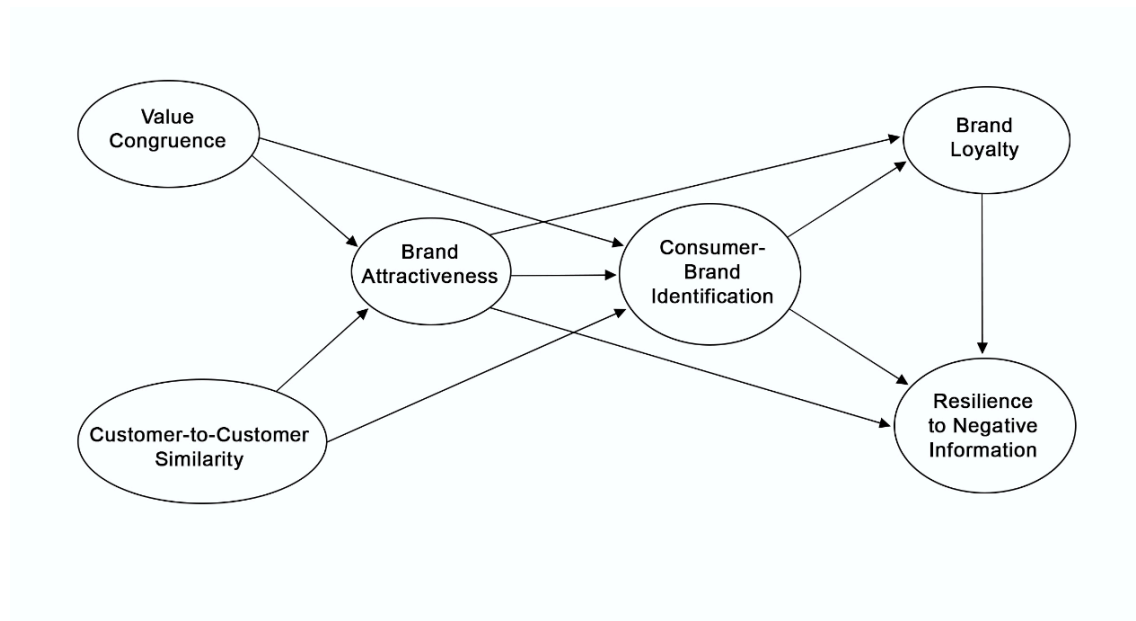


Figure 7. Conceptual model of Consumer–Brand Identification (Elbedweihi et al. 2016).

4.2 Customer-to-customer similarity

Customer-to-customer similarity means the self-perceived similarity to other customers or users of the brand (Brocato, Voorhees & Baker 2012). Similarity, in turn, is the degree to which customers have mutual characteristics such as age and gender, and psychographic traits (Shen, Huang, Chu & Liao 2010). According to Martin (1996), customers influence each other directly through interpersonal encounters, or indirectly by being part of the environment. Based on this, Brocato et al. (2012) argue that customers' perception of other customers' observed traits and characteristics can influence their attitudes and behaviour toward a brand. Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang (2011) further suggest that when customers perceive high similarity to fellow customers of a company, they often become attached to it.

According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), a key assumption of identification is the consumer's perception of belonging to a particular social group. The social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) postulates that individuals prefer relationships with

others similar to themselves in order to maintain a consistent sense of self (Marin and Ruiz 2007). In addition, Cialdini (2001) asserts that individuals can cultivate a fruitful relationship with others through similarities. Guided by these assertions, Elbedweihi et al. (2016) found that high customer-to-customer similarity is also positively related to CBI.

4.3 Brand attractiveness and CBI

Brand attractiveness is the positive evaluation of the brand's central, distinctive and enduring associations and characteristics (Ahearne, Bhattacharya & Gruen 2005). A brand tends to have an attractive identity when the consumer's sense of self matches the brand associations (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Currás-Pérez, Bigné-Alcañiz and Alvarado-Herrera (2009) have found that coherence, the brand identity character which helps consumers maintain a consistent sense of self, is related to brand attractiveness.

According to the findings of Elbedweihi et al. (2016), brand attractiveness is a consequence of customer-to-customer similarity and value congruence. When there is congruency between a brand's values and consumers' personal values, consumers are inclined to express and display the characteristics and values in their self-concept more fully and authentically (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail 1994). This corresponds to the notion of identity similarity that Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) have proposed as an important driver of perceived attractiveness of commercial entities, namely brands. (Elbedweihi et al. 2016).

In order to satisfy their needs of self-verification, consumers tend to evaluate a brand by matching their sense of self together with the brand user image (Kressmann, Herrmann, Huber, Huber & Lee 2006). The attractiveness of a brand tends to be related to the extent to which consumers perceive other users of the brand to be similar to themselves (Currás-Pérez et al. 2009). This can then lead to the consumers evaluating the brand more positively (Kressmann et al. 2006).

When consumers identify with a company with an attractive perceived identity, it may result in benefits to the consumers in terms of self-enhancement (Marin, Ruiz & Rubio 2009). They will feel a motivational impulse to attain a psychological attachment to a brand when they perceive it as attractive and at least partially fulfilling one or more of the fundamental self-definitional needs (Currás-Pérez et al. 2009). According to Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen (2005) and Marin and De Maya (2013), perceived attractiveness of a brand's attributes gives rise to consumer-company identification. Therefore, brand attractiveness is also positively related to CBI (Elbedweihy et al. 2016).

According to Ahearne et al. (2005), Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) and Currás-Pérez et al. (2009), social identity theory highlights brand identification as a significant driver of consumer behaviour, where the attractiveness of the brand's identity is highlighted. When consumers' self-definitional motives are satisfied through brand characteristics and attributes, the brand will receive greater attitudinal and behavioural support from the consumers (He, Li & Harris 2012). In turn, this may lead to both brand loyalty and a tendency to overlook negative information about the brand (Elbedweihy et al. 2016).

It is important to note that consumer-brand relationships based on identification cannot be imposed by companies. Instead they are selective and volitional acts made by the consumers. They choose to identify with the brands they perceive as attractive, based on their self-definitional needs. (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003)

4.4 Consequences of CBI

Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman and Sloan (1976) contend that associations with attractive social groups leads to significant ego enhancement and positive outcomes. According to Huber, Vollhardt, Matthes and Vogel (2010), the more a brand is integrated into the self and the more the consumer profits from the brand in a social and psychological manner, the more likely the consumer is to spend their financial, social and time resources to maintain and nurture their relationship with the brand.

When consumers desire to support the brand they identify with, they often go beyond normal purchasing behaviour (Sen, Di & Bhattacharya 2009), for instance dismissing negative information about the brand (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003).

Because products and brands are important for the consumers' identity construction, they are more likely to buy and use the brand's products to distinguish themselves from others (Cheema and Kaikati 2010). This may explain why, in terms of CBI, value congruence is more important than customer-to-customer similarity. In fact, value congruence is a notable predictor of CBI. Value congruence plays a crucial role in cultivating meaningful relationships with consumers, which is most likely explained by the consumers' need for self-verification and uniqueness (Elbedweihy et al. 2016). The findings of Elbedweihy et al. (2016) support the arguments of the self-verification theory (Swann 1983) that consumers are willing to form enduring relationships with a brand that validates and verifies who they are. Elbedweihy et al. (2016) also argue that both brand traits (values and attractiveness) and entities in the surrounding social environment (other brand users) are important precursors that enhance consumers' identification with a brand.

The findings of Elbedweihy et al. (2016) support the arguments of the self-verification theory (Swann 1983) that consumers are willing to form enduring relationships with a brand that validates and verifies who they are. Elbedweihy et al. (2016) also argue that both brand traits (values and attractiveness) and entities in the surrounding social environment (other brand users) are important precursors that enhance consumers' identification with a brand. The effect of value congruence on CBI is in line with Zhang and Bloemer's (2008) finding of the influence of value congruence on brand relationship quality, a construct similar to CBI. The impact of customer-to-customer similarity on CBI for privately consumed products is consistent with the study of Karaosmanoglu et al. (2011), which provides evidence of other customers' effect on emotional attachment and consumer–company identification in the service context.

Given that consumers perceive products and brands as part of their self-concept (Belk, 1988; Escalas and Bettman, 2003), the association with particular brands is a vehicle that they can use to express their authenticity (Dutton et al., 1994) and distinctiveness

(Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). When a brand's values and consumers' personal values are congruent, consumers are more willing to express themselves more fully and authentically (Dutton et al. 1994).

5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In this chapter, the methods used in collection of empirical data are explained in more detail. The chosen research method for this study is qualitative, as the aim of the study is to generate knowledge grounded in human experience, which is the intent of qualitative research (Sandelowski 2004). The purpose of this empirical research is to generate primary knowledge about vegan food brands' brand development, so that their views and actions can be compared to the theoretical framework, analysed and discussed.

This qualitative study is based on semi-structured interviews, from which empirical evidence was gathered. All interviewees were in a managerial position and primarily responsible for brand-related matters. It was imperative to gather primary data to ensure accurate, convincing and insightful depictions of the companies' views on their brand development.

As there has not been much research on vegan food companies and the industry itself, a qualitative method is the most suitable, because the study aims to find out *how* these brands have developed, and *why* they have made decisions the way they have. To understand their brand development, their views and actions should be understood in depth, which is what qualitative research aims for (Silverman 2001: 15).

5.1 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews conducted for this study were semi-structured so that a systematic comparison of the information gathered from the participants would be possible, but also because this method is likely to receive considered responses and provide access to views, interpretations, understandings and opinions. All interviewees were asked the same standard questions, but they were allowed to express their own views on the subject so that an exploratory interview could occur. More specific questions were also asked when needed to clarify a previous answer or to request more information in order

to reach a deeper understanding. The interviewees often answered a question by starting to talk about a topic which would have had its own question later in the interview, sometimes resulting in the order of the interview questions being changed. However, they were allowed to do so, to ensure a free-flowing interview to occur. By using this approach, a balance of comparability and detailed answers was reached. (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008: 81–82; Silverman 2001: 113–114)

The interviews were done on the phone and Skype. This was due to the interviewer and the interviewee always being in separate countries. The interviews took place in late September and early October of 2018. With the interviewees' consent, the discussions were recorded. It was also agreed that no company names or product names would be revealed in the final work. The longest interviews took 60 minutes, with the shortest one being 35 minutes. This allowed plenty of time to go through all the questions thoroughly without having to cut any answers short.

5.2 The interview questions

The interview questions were formulated based on the theoretical framework on brand development, Consumer–Brand Identification and the main factors behind the emergence of the vegan food industry. The questions mainly followed the structure of the theoretical framework, by going through each topic in roughly the same order starting from brand-related questions (identity, vision, values etc.) before getting into questions about CBI.

Once all brand-related questions were answered, the companies were questioned about the importance and effects of culture (both local country's culture and the vegan consumer culture) on international brand development. The reasoning behind the chosen interview questions was to answer the main research question and objectives. Especially brand identity was discussed in detail with the companies, as it was expected to be one of the most essential topics of the interviews, because brand identity is related to several of the objectives of the research. At the end of three of the interviews, the respondents

wished to learn about the interviewer's own thoughts on brand development, the vegan food industry and the particular brand in question, which may indicate high engagement on the companies' part to the topic.

5.3 The interviewed companies

In total four companies were interviewed (Figure 8). Three of them were Finnish, one was from the United States. They varied considerably in size, age and in the number of countries they operate in. The smallest company has less than 10 employees including production, the largest over 200. Two of the companies are considered pioneers in their market with decades of experience, while the two others were formed in the 2010's. The number of countries of operation varies between the companies from three to approximately ten countries. Their internationalisation is also at different stages, as some have just begun entering new markets, while others have done it for decades.

	FOUNDING YEAR	EMPLOYEES	REVENUE	COUNTRIES OF OPERATION	INDUSTRY	NATIONALITY
COMPANY A	1980	200	14M\$ (2011)	5	Food Ind.	US
COMPANY B	1990	25	3.1M€ (2018)	3	Food Ind.	FIN
COMPANY C	2010	13	6M€ (2018)	6	Food Ind.	FIN
COMPANY D	2017	7	-	3	Food Ind.	FIN

Figure 8. Companies interviewed (anonymised).

All companies included in this study are exclusively vegan and produce meat substitutes. Their products are similar in use, yet they are all different sorts of meat substitutes, except for one of the companies which has several product lines. Each interviewee was in a managerial position in the company, one of them being the CEO, while three others were marketing managers. This was important as they were likely in

the best position from all of the employees of the companies to give detailed and insightful answers to brand-related questions.

	DATE OF INTERVIEW	ROLE IN THE COMPANY	INTERVIEW DURATION
COMPANY A	3.10.2018	Head of Marketing	35min
COMPANY B	28.9.2018	Marketing Manager	55min
COMPANY C	28.9.2018	Head of Marketing	45min
COMPANY D	1.10.2018	CEO	60min

Figure 9. Interviewees.

5.4 Thematic analysis

Once the interviews were completed, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns in the interview data. The data was coded to describe the content, which was then reviewed to identify overarching and coherent themes. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing and reporting themes found within a data set. It ensures that the gathered data is processed systematically and thoroughly, increases the validity of the study, and helps produce trustworthy and insightful findings. Based on the thematic analysis, the findings can be summarised. (Braun and Clarke 2006; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008: 130)

5.5 Reliability and validity

In non-quantitative research, fulfilling the reliability criteria can be achieved by ensuring the research process is transparent and detailed regarding research strategy and data analysis (Silverman 282–283). All of these factors are presented in the paper. The interview questions reflect the theoretical framework and the interviewees were all in such positions within their companies to give the most insightful answers. The semi-structured interview allowed the respondents to answer freely, yet the gathered data is comparable (Eriksson and Kovalainen: 81–82). Using thematic analysis further increased the reliability and validity of the study (Braun and Clarke 2006). In addition, enough time was reserved with each interviewee to go through all questions, and consequently the answers were deep, insightful and detailed.

Silverman (2001: 292) argues that aggregating data in order to arrive at an overall “truth” is difficult. However, the aim of this study is not to arrive at any absolute truth. Instead, it is about finding out how these vegan companies develop their brand, while acknowledging that other companies may hold different views and make different kinds of decisions. The study is about the subjective experiences and views of the people involved, and does not claim to be valid outside this context. In other words, the study has been framed in a way that the chosen methods are able to provide a valid result within those frames.

Furthermore, a method for validation, triangulation (Silverman 2001: 290), has been utilised in the study, as the chapter about the vegan food industry is an overview of the growth of the industry and the underlying reasons for it. These findings are taken into account and offer a basis for the relationship between the brand and the consumer, which is what the theoretical framework and empirical research are about. The overall demand for vegan products is explained, but also the individuals’ need to consume these products is given solid background. Together, these observations can be compared to and are in line with the empirical findings, thus helping to validate the study by way of triangulation, i.e. comparison of different types of data (Silverman 2001: 290).

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the empirical research are presented (but not analysed). As can be expected, several similarities were found on how vegan brands have created a brand identity, what their values are and how they approach their brand development in terms of culture. However, many differences were discovered as well, ranging from culture's impact on the brand when entering new markets to their approach to their marketing activities in terms of using ethicality as an advantage. It should be noted that there are considerable differences in size, age and product range of the companies, which explains some of the variation of the results. The companies are also at very different stages of internationalisation. Despite the similarities in the products of the interviewed companies, it was found that even within a small industry there are considerable differences in approach to brand creation and development. The following is a thorough presentation of the findings from all the topics that were discussed.

6.1 Brand identity and values

When asked about the brand's identity, all interviewed companies immediately began listing things that are actually considered as values. All interviewees also had in common the tendency to go back to the brand's values even when the topic under discussion was something else related to the brand. Later it was also discovered that three of the four brands were built on the values of the original founders. From these points it becomes clear that for vegan brands values are essential, and, as one interviewee put it, "it is in the DNA of the company". Therefore, it can be said that a vegan brand's identity and values go hand in hand, as they are often either inherent or at least essentially affect the brand's identity formation early on.

All four companies described their brand's identity as vegan. From this rather obvious statement they went on to elaborate about responsibility, sustainability and the willingness to produce quality food for everyone, not just vegans. All companies mentioned vegans and vegetarians being their core consumers, but also made it clear

that vegans as a target group is too small and niche from a business perspective. Instead, they spoke about aiming to produce food for everyone, including flexitarians and meat-eaters. This “food for the whole nation” idea was found to be a part of the identity of all the interviewed brands. However, every brand acknowledged vegans as a very important core group that should never be overlooked, as they form a key customer segment and often act as an advocate for the vegan brands.

The values that were mentioned the most were responsibility, environmentalism, healthiness, transparency and domesticity, which were all mentioned by at least two of the brands. Responsibility was the only one mentioned by all brands. Other mentioned values were animal rights, “saving the world”, fair trade, cleanliness and organicity.

6.2 Value congruence

Looking at the vegan brands objectively and from the outside, it seems obvious that their values are congruent with their consumers. However, how this came to be was one of the findings of the study, and there were clear differences between the brands. In fact, three of the brands mentioned without asking that their brand values originally come from the values of their founders. However, only one of them was founded on the basis of veganism. The other two started from a macrobiotic diet (where the use of animal products is only reduced) and naturalism standpoints, respectively. Over time those brands gradually shifted into vegan values. Both can be said to have had a considerable impact on the eventual growth of the vegan food industry, as they have been pioneers in their respective markets.

In other words, the three aforementioned brands have congruent values with their consumers because they either helped to create the vegan food phenomenon which can be seen today, or were born amidst it. While the fourth brand did not mention the values already being there at the formation of the company (nor do they mention it online), their values are still very similar to the other three. Based on these findings and what can be read on any vegan brand’s website, technically vegan brands do not actively seek

to match their values to the consumer's values, because the values are the same from the beginning. Their values are inherently congruent with their consumers' values. In fact, two of the brands mentioned wanting specifically to be leaders in these values.

6.3 Brand vision and consumer segments

The overarching theme found in the vegan brands' visions was to produce plant-based food for everyone and everywhere for a reasonable price, while taking environmental issues and sustainability into account by reducing consumers' dependence on animal agricultures. All the factors mentioned in this description were supported by all four brands. They all felt that plant-based food is the future and wanted to offer it for a reasonable price to everyone, not just vegans.

All brands have identified vegans as their core consumer segment, and three brands specifically mentioned having identified young adults as a key consumer segment. However, when asked about the brand's approach, every brand mentioned wanting to offer the product to everyone and becoming an everyday food product for the masses. Every brand was adamant about not being a niche product, because the vegan consumer segment is too small. Two brands have specifically set their main focus on flexitarians, although all mentioned about not differentiating between separate consumer segments too much in their marketing activities. The brands with a longer history were the only ones to mention more advanced segmentation within a larger customer segment.

Three brands talked about wanting to offer a product that can be cooked easily. This easiness for the consumer was mentioned by all of them. Two brands also talked about debunking myths regarding vegan food and especially how difficult its preparing is assumed to be. One of the brands sees itself as simply a meat substitute, others would rather welcome new ways of cooking instead of replacing the meat with a plant-based option in traditional recipes. All brands seemed to be on the same page about changing the current food culture.

6.4 Brand authenticity

Each brand thought the brand's authenticity to be vital for them. In addition, all brands agreed that for a vegan brand authenticity is even more important than for other brands, because responsibility is a part of their promise to the consumers. All brands except for one have also actively tried to communicate their authenticity to consumers, and view it as very important to them.

Transparency is one way authenticity has been communicated. Two brands actively seek to be as transparent as possible, by informing the consumers about their supply chain to great detail. They let the consumers know who are the farmers whose produce they use and they try to answer as many questions as possible about anything related to what goes into the product, such as whether they use GMOs, which they do not. Furthermore, one brand also sued a government body, because they felt their transparency and authenticity were compromised by a law which would have prohibited any company from using the word "meat" in their products and marketing, if the product did not contain meat from an animal, meaning the word "meatless" would have become illegal for a vegan brand to use. This brand felt the lawsuit added to their authenticity, by way of fighting for their rights in the marketplace.

6.5 Ethical brand

Ethics is what makes the conversation around vegan food often quite vehement. When asked about whether the brands consider themselves as ethical or moral brands, and whether they use this to their advantage, the answers were differing. All brands acknowledged they have an ethical advantage, but their approach to using it varied considerably. One brand has adopted a positive-only approach, where they do educate consumers about how buying their products makes sense ethically in terms of animal suffering and environment, for example, but they do not want any negativity connected to the brand. They did not immediately think of themselves as an ethical brand. They would also rather focus on the positives about their brand than the negatives about

competing brands. In addition, they cooperate with organisations related to environmental issues and animal welfare.

Another brand's approach is similar in terms of educating consumers, but they do see themselves as an ethical brand. They also do not avoid being connected to negativity, meaning they could, for instance, use marketing content which indirectly blames the meat industry for being unethical. Despite this, they were also the only brand open to introducing non-vegan products.

The most aggressive brand of the four in terms of ethics has done provocative marketing, where they compare their plant-based product to meat products, showing the meat product in bad light. This is a bold strategy, as it has infuriated some people, but at the same time it has gained a lot of attention with no marketing costs. The strategy has also been imitated by other vegan brands who share their more aggressive approach to the utilisation of ethics. In addition, they educate consumers about environmental issues, highlighting how using their products can help the planet.

The last brand of the four also considers themselves as an ethical brand and they are very active about ethics in general. They also educate consumers as much as they can. They describe their actions as brand activism and consider themselves as a voice of authority and a leader on these issues. However, they do avoid talking about animal rights directly, as they acknowledge many people would feel like their personal values are being attacked.

Marketing material and channels

Regarding marketing material and channels there were several different views among the interviewed brands. Three brands focus a lot on the packaging of the product as a channel to communicate responsibility to the consumers. For example, they have included logos which communicate about the carbon footprint of the product, or its healthiness. Another similarity between the brands was to communicate the easiness of the product in its packaging.

Social media is an important marketing channel to all of the brands, and two of them have identified it as their main marketing channel. Three brands specifically mentioned having identified young adults as a key consumer segment, which is best reached on social media. Only Facebook and Instagram were mentioned as social media channels. Two of the brands actively create new recipes and publish them on their website, and then promote them on social media.

Only one of the brands mentioned traditional media such as TV and print as an important marketing channel, and they were also the only one to not specifically mention young adults as a key target group. Conversely, two other brands use influencer marketing, where a food blogger or youtuber receives the product from the company, uses it and rates it. Social media influencers such as these have attentive audiences which are popular especially among young adults, which is why this type of marketing has been adopted. It is also a way for the brands to avoid becoming too attached to their products and blind to what others feel about them.

6.6 Competition

Three brands have identified the meat industry as their main competitor, while one mostly wants to focus on what they themselves do within the vegan food industry. Identifying the meat industry as the main competitor stems from setting flexitarians as the target consumer segment, which is what the three aforementioned brands have done. It may not be a coincidence that those three companies produce substitutes for meat, while the fourth company's products are not as clearly meat substitutes.

None of the brands consider other companies in the vegan food industry as their key competitors. On the contrary, three of the brands mentioned often cooperating with other vegan brands. This friendliness towards competitors within the same industry may have something to do with the fact that those three brands are all from Finland, which is a small market. Competition seemed to be closely related to who the brands have identified as their customers.

6.7 Consumer–Brand Identification

In terms of social groups, two brands have identified vegans, while two others have identified flexitarians as the main social consumer group. However, two of the brands contradicted themselves to some extent regarding segmentation, by at different times claiming both vegans and flexitarians were the main focus. Nevertheless, all four brands said they do not differentiate between vegans, vegetarians, flexitarians or even omnivores in terms of how they present the brand to them. Despite this, all brands have divided consumers into smaller segments based on age and gender, to whom they try to aim the majority of their marketing efforts. The emphasis seems to be on young people, and more on women than men.

All brands agreed that they already try or will take into account the consumers' tendency to identify with brands they feel are similar to the social group they are part of. Three brands mentioned they do it all the time, and one brand will do it in the future. The one brand that has not done it yet wants to differentiate between segments more in the future. The youngest brand of the four is founded so directly on the basis of the founders' personal values (which they called “vegan”), that they can be said to literally be part of the same social group. On the other hand, two of the oldest brands have been forerunners in creating this social group by consistently promoting the values this social group is based on.

The ways in which the brands try to take CBI into account include word-of-mouth, influencer marketing, cooperating with food evangelists, and getting people involved on social media. In general, they try to appeal to the values of the consumers by sharing content about, for example, the environmental effects of buying their products. Values seemed to be in the centre of how the vegan brands try to establish CBI. Educating the consumers was also an overarching theme among all brands, which in turn enhances CBI because of value congruence between the brand and the consumers.

One way how CBI can be seen in action is how vegans advocate for vegan brands pro bono, especially on social media. For example, the most provocative brand of the four sometimes posts content on social media which makes people who do not share the

same values angry, and a debate ensues. Brand-loyal vegans then defend the brand, while the company itself does not have to take part in the debate. They only act as the initiator, because they can count on loyal vegans to take part in the debate. Consumer behaviour such as this is a clear sign how consumers have identified with a brand to such an extent that they will protect it as if it were a friend.

6.8 Culture's effect on brand development

The brands were asked whether they take a country specific approach when entering a new market, and how the country's culture affects brand decisions. Each brand's answers varied from one another, but all indicated that the local culture does affect how the brand enters the market. It should be noted that, as there is considerable variation in the size and age of the companies, their internationalisation is at very different stages, which influences how they viewed the local culture's impact. Some brands have just begun internationalising, others have done it for a very long time.

The biggest of the brands wants to be "culturally relevant" by adjusting their product matrix whenever they enter a new market. They acquire insights on the local eating habits and gastronomy and use these data as a basis for selecting products to be brought into the new market. Visually they do not differentiate between markets, as the packaging is always the same. The brand name also stays the same regardless of the market, even though its name is in English.

The other bigger brand uses private labels when entering a new market. This means they only act as the producer of the product, but the brand has a culturally adjusted local name in the local language, and the packaging is also completely different and indistinguishable from local brands, apart from the original producer. In some countries this company does not have a brand presence at all, instead they are simply the producer and have minimal say in any brand-related matters. This brand is focused mostly on the Nordic countries and said private labels are a much easier way to enter the market, because some countries are very restrictive about exported goods, especially food.

The third brand has a hybrid approach to brand decisions when entering new markets. They do want to have the same brand presence everywhere in terms of name and visuals, and in the future they will decrease the number of “brands within the brand” and drop the ones that are too different from the main brand. However, they do take local culture into account in foreign markets by altering their product matrix, but also by adjusting the product’s placement at the grocery shop. For example, in Finland their product is classified as “fresh food” and is found from fresh food section at the supermarket, but in other countries they have to be found from the frozen food section, because the purchasing culture of food is different. In Finland part of their success has been their product’s findability next to meat products, but in other markets the product must be placed among frozen food in order to be found by the consumer. The brand emphasised that they will reconsider their brand strategy in the near future.

The smallest of the brands claimed they take the local culture into account when entering a new country. However, they still had exactly the same product and same marketing message when they entered a country which has a vastly different and very traditional food culture. The product was not received well among consumers, although it must be noted that they have just begun entering new markets, which partly explains the lack of cultural adjustment. Later they revealed that they are merely testing new markets on a small scale in order to be better prepared for future expansion.

6.9 Country culture vs. vegan culture

The brands were asked which one they think is more important to their brand when entering a new market, the vegan consumer culture or the country’s local culture. Their views differed greatly, as two brands thought both must be taken into account, one brand felt the vegan culture is more important, and one brand emphasised the importance of the country’s culture. Again, the size and age differences of the interviewed companies must be considered, as well as their resources.

While two brands thought both vegan culture and country culture should be considered, their reasoning for this was different. One thinks vegans are important as early adopters, but because vegans alone do not generate enough revenue, flexitarians must be targeted, and that is where one must adapt to the country culture. The other has chosen a hybrid approach, but from the four interviewed brands they are the one which least wants to differentiate between vegans and other consumer segments, which is why they focus on the quality of the product above anything else.

The brand that thought vegan culture is more important did not dismiss the local culture's importance, but they do not focus on it much either. They feel vegans are the key to any new market, because they create the foundation for the brand and serve as good advertisement. However, it must be noted that this brand first aims to have their product in local restaurants before they introduce the product for grocery stores. It is also the smallest of the brands, the one with the least resources, and they have only begun testing new markets.

The brand that thinks appealing to the country culture as more important bases their approach on cultural eating preferences. Their reasoning is that if the offered product does not match the culture's eating preferences, even vegans will not buy the product because they simply do not make food in a certain way. The brand emphasised the importance of "getting the cultural relevance right". According to them, cultural relevance is obtained by altering the product matrix according to insights and statistics on how people prefer to eat in a specific culture. In addition, they have shifted their main focus to meat eaters in order to create the biggest impact on the world, which partly explains why they think appealing to the country's local culture is more important than appealing to the vegan consumers.

7 DISCUSSION

This chapter is about comparing the interview data from this study to the literature included in the theoretical framework, to see if and how they are connected. First, the vegan brands' brand development in terms of identity, values, vision, authenticity, community and ethics is analysed and compared to the literature on these topics. After that follows an analysis on whether the literature on Consumer–Brand Identification holds true in the context of vegan brands. Finally, the effect of culture (both the local country's culture and the vegan consumer culture) on the vegan brands' international brand development is analysed extensively.

7.1 Brand identity and values

According to Kapferer (2012: 1), it is necessary for brands to connect with consumers by offering them products which help them express and communicate their consumer identities, and that companies compete in the market of these values. All the vegan brands interviewed for this study made it clear that their brand identity and brand values have been firmly intertwined since the foundation of the brand. Because the most mentioned values were responsibility, environmentalism and veganism, it seems clear why vegan brands are successful in connecting with vegan consumers and others who share these values, as Kapferer (2012: 160) suggests the meaningfulness of the brand creates resonance between the brand and its consumers. Kapferer (2012: 160) also asserts brands promote ideals, which is exactly what the vegan brands were found to be doing with their “save the world” mentality, value leadership and education of their consumers about, for instance, environmental issues. In short, values determined the identity of the vegan brands.

Stengel (2011: 7–8) argues that the brand is the only force that connects people's core beliefs inside the company with the values of its customers. In the context of the interviewed vegan companies, they have developed their brand around values which they share with their core consumers, mostly vegans. In other words, values are an

essential part of the brand's identity, which is why the brands are attractive to their consumers. Based on the interviews, it seems that each brand has been able to maintain its personality, which highlights their belonging to the same social group as their consumers. According to Kapferer's brand system pyramid (2012: 159), a brand establishes its personality in the manner in which it speaks about its products and reveals what type of person it would be if it were a human being. Kapferer (2012: 159) also argues that a brand personality fills a psychological function by allowing customers to identify with the brand or project themselves into it. Both these claims hold true in the context of the interviewed vegan brands, as they have managed to create a strong brand identity for their core consumers to identify with and to place the brand within the same social group as their consumers. Both of these accomplishments are possible mainly because the values the brands are founded on resonate with the values of their consumers. Keller (2001) argues that brand resonance is the ultimate goal of building a brand, which seems to be an essential factor in the success of vegan brands.

The power of a brand resides in the minds of its consumers (Keller 2009). According to Aaker (2014) and Keller (2001), to build a strong brand identity and create brand equity, prospective customers must have relevant knowledge structure in their minds so that they are able to respond to marketing activities. Aaker (2014) and Keller (2001) also assert that marketing communications of a company can play a crucial role in shaping that knowledge. Both these claims are accurate in the context of the interviewed vegan brands. Although their approaches were, to an extent, different, all brands aim to educate the consumer about the benefits of buying their product in terms of ethicality, environment and healthiness. To all of them it is an integral part of their marketing message.

7.2 Brand vision

Aaker (2014) argues that a brand vision should aim beyond the product for a higher purpose, a brand personality, and emotional, social and self-expressive benefits. This argument seems to hold true, as the overarching theme in the vegan brands' visions was

to produce plant-based food for everyone while taking environmental issues into account by reducing consumers' dependence on animal agricultures. The brands' identities seemed to be closer to a person than a company (brand personality), they care about animal rights (emotional benefit), they answer to the social demand for ethical and healthier products caused by increased awareness of issues related to these factors (social benefit), and they offer a set of values for the consumer to identify with (self-expressive benefit).

According to Stengel's Ideal Tree Framework (2011), a strong brand vision or ideal powers companies and enables them to outgrow their competition. The vision is a company's shared goal of making people's lives better and the reason it exists. These arguments also fit well with the interviewed vegan brands, as they all saw plant-based food as the food of the future, and want to offer it to everyone, everywhere for a reasonable price. These ideas form the brand vision or ideal for these vegan brands, which they then utilise to invite consumers to join. Kapferer (2012: 34) argues that the best brand visions penetrate the whole organisation and resonate among its employees and customers alike, which highlights the importance of the company's employees' belief in their brand vision. This is evident in the interviewed vegan brands, as three of them were founded on the visions and values of their original founders.

7.3 Brand authenticity

Brand authenticity is perceived when a brand fulfils its brand promise in a consistent, continuous and unique way, and its purpose is to build trust between the brand and the customer (Schallehn et al. 2014). The promise of vegan brands is an ethical and healthier alternative to meat or dairy, made in an environmentally friendly way. Once again, for vegan brands, brand authenticity is possible because of the values the brand is founded on. It is also arguably one of their main strengths.

When considering the vegan consumers, vegan brands have an additional advantage to that of value congruence and CBI, and that is brand authenticity. This is highlighted

best when comparing the “born vegan companies” to older and much larger chains in the FMCG industry who have now introduced vegan product categories. Although it is generally viewed positively that the large chains are now also offering vegan products, consumers (especially vegan consumers) may still prefer brands that are exclusively vegan, because they may see it as inauthentic if a company first produces meat and dairy for decades, and then jumps into the vegan bandwagon when there is a profit to be made. If you turn the tables and imagine a vegan company introducing a meat product category, vegan consumers would probably view it as utter betrayal to the values the consumers and the brand have had together. Because of this, the vegan brands have an inherent advantage over non-vegan companies that also offer vegan food products. They also do not need to go through a brand makeover in order to reinvent themselves as more appealing to what the consumer wants. Instead, the values are already in place during formation or immediately after it and therefore congruent with the values of the consumer. In the future, vegan companies should use this inherent advantage to remain competitive against the large food producers, as more competition will almost certainly follow. At the same time, they need be very careful should they ever want to incorporate ingredients derived from animals into their products in the future.

The credibility of a brand can also be enhanced by giving more attention to its whole production process, which can include sourcing from ethical and sustainable supplies of ingredients, manufacturing in an environmentally sensitive manner, and minimising packaging (Jeanes 2013). Two of the interviewed brands mentioned being as transparent as possible in terms of their production process. They use products from as sustainable sources as possible and aim to inform the origin of the ingredients as accurately as possible, including the farmers who produce them, and whether they use GMOs or not. To them transparency is a way to communicate their authenticity. In addition, plant-based food is by definition environmentally friendlier (Poore and Nemecek 2018) than meat, and because it is not an animal agriculture, it is also arguably more ethical (Harari 2015). Due to these factors, Jeanes’ (2013) assertion on the enhanced credibility of a brand seems to hold true when it comes to vegan brands. In fact, it seems that vegan brands do not need to make any considerable extra effort to seem more authentic in the eyes of the consumers, because factors such as responsibility, environmental concern

and ethicality are, by definition, already in place for companies producing exclusively plant-based food (assuming the sources of the ingredients are selected with care).

7.4 Brand community

Fournier and Lee (2009) describe brand communities as the owner of the brand because brand communities by their interest in the brand have both loyalty towards it, but also vested interest in ensuring the brand remains true to its values (McAlexander et al. 2002). Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) even argue that brand communities can be seen as the acting guardians of the brand's legitimacy. These views seem to be in line with the findings in this study, as three of the interviewed brands mentioned how vegans advocate and defend the brand's views on social media. Consumers being loyal to the brand in this way is also connected to these brands maintaining their personality. Furthermore, several brands mentioned using influencer marketing or cooperation with food evangelists, with the goal of appealing to the vegan consumer culture from a different point of view. This seems to be in line with Keller's (2009) view that relationships between the consumers of a brand have become increasingly important. Therefore, brands should encourage and help brand communities to emerge. For a company in a small market such as vegan food, the importance of a strong brand community is arguably even greater.

All interviewed brands are very active on social media where they not only market and advertise their products, but also try to engage their followers. This makes sense, as vegetarians and vegans are very active on social media, partly because, in terms of demographics, both vegans and/or vegetarians and social media users are most prominent in the youngest segments (The Vegan Society 2018; Pew Research Center 2018). Another reason is that especially vegans have to pay more attention when choosing ingredients to purchase, and it tends to be more difficult for them to use recipes than it is for omnivores. This has led to vegans and vegetarians forming online communities for the purpose of sharing information and ideas on food. They are also very active sharing information on new vegan products. The biggest Facebook

community for vegans in Finland is the vegan fast food themed “Sipsikaljavegaanit” with over 55,000 members. Other essential vegan Facebook communities are “Vegaaniset kasvisruoat” (35,000 members) and “Vegaanituotteet” (23,000 members). Visibility in online communities such as these is potentially vital for any new vegan company or product entering the market. Companies also get instant feedback by following the conversation of a new product launch. All four interviewed brands utilise these online communities for spreading the word about new product launches and gathering feedback. (Facebook 2018a; Facebook 2018b; Facebook 2018c)

The online activeness of vegans also shows in keywords they use to search information. Google Food Trends (2016) reported that in 2015 in the US one of the top keywords associated with food was “vegan”. For instance, searches for vegan cheese (80%), vegan ice cream (109%) and vegan chocolate (86%) increased considerably in 2015. All four interviewed brands have responded to the increased interest by introducing lots of recipes on their websites. This is a part of their efforts to make vegan food easier to make for consumers who are not as familiar with it. One of them even mentioned recipes being one of their main marketing contents.

Another effective way for vegan brands to expand and strengthen their brand community is with campaigns such as Veganuary or Vegaanihaaste, in which all interviewed brands regularly participate. The purpose is to inspire people to try adhering to a vegan diet for the duration of January and then possibly for the whole year. The challenge gains more and more attention each year as more people choose to take part, including several celebrities, who then in turn bring more attention to the challenge. Naturally, to all the vegan companies this period is an enormous opportunity for coverage, sales and growth. (Vegaanihaaste 2017; Veganuary 2017)

7.5 Ethical brand

Jeanes (2013) argues that a moral or ethical brand can be identified by the nature and intensity of the ethics, debates and concerns of the time, which are reflected upon the

brand's culture. This is evident in the case of vegan brands, as ethical and environmental concerns have increased in the past years, and vegan brands utilise these factors in their brand development. Jeanes (2013) also suggests a brand should be understood as socially constructed, but with an identity which reflects the dominance of some interests over others in the creation of the brand. This is also evident, as vegan brands create a clear identity with specific interests and values over others, i.e. favouring an environmentally friendly product over others, and lessening animal suffering.

Jeanes (2013) also highlights the co-creation process of the ethical brand where managers, employees and brand communities create the brand's culture together. Again, this view holds true for vegan brands, as consumer-brand identification is a key element in their success, and they utilise brand communities considerably, especially online. Together, these descriptions sum up and tie together the factors and reasons why vegan brands can be considered as ethical brands. Because of the strong argument that plant-based food is better for the environment (Poore and Nemecek 2018) and the increased concern over animal welfare (Packaged Facts 2017), it can be claimed that companies that exclusively produce plant-based food are inherently ethical in nature. However, it was found that even among similar vegan brands their approach to their ethicality differs.

All interviewed brands acknowledged they have ethical advantages over non-vegan companies. Each brand mentioned educating consumers about the environmental benefits of their products, which is in line with Aaker's (2014) argument that brands should aim to create appropriate knowledge structures in the minds of their potential consumers. These were the ethicality traits that all brands shared. However, there seems to be a clear distinction regarding these vegan brands' approach to ethical considerations. Based on the results, the interviewed vegan brands consider using environmental issues in their marketing content as not too provocative compared to animal rights. Each of the four brands utilises the environmental advantage, whereas only one brand truly takes advantage of the animal welfare factor by unapologetically blaming the meat industry of being unethical. The other brands either do not use animal welfare at all in their marketing activities, or avoid mentioning animal rights directly.

This is due to the tendency of non-vegan consumers to feel that their personality is under attack when confronted with an ethical argument regarding meat consumption.

It may not be a coincidence that the smallest of the brands was also the most aggressive one in terms of provocative marketing. Most likely this is because the brand is very close to its founders' personal values and this way the brand has maintained its personality (Kornberger 2010). This can be an advantage, because for like-minded consumers it offers a strong brand personality to identify with (Kapferer 2012: 33), but as the brand grows and it has more to lose, it may be sensible to tone down the provocativeness of its marketing, which is exactly what the oldest and largest two brands have done, by dropping animal rights from their marketing content in the sense that they do not directly use the argument to promote their own assumed superior ethicality.

7.6 Vegan brands and Consumer–Brand Identification

In order to maintain a consistent sense of self, individuals prefer relationships with others similar to themselves (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Marin and Ruiz 2007). Thus, a key assumption of CBI is the consumer's perception of belonging to a specific social group (Ashforth and Mael 1989). Vegans form a social group who share certain values, such as concern for the environment, their personal health and animal rights (The Vegan Society 2018). Based on the interview results, vegan brands have successfully placed themselves within the same social group, because they are founded on the same values that their consumers have. Therefore, vegan brands' CBI is strong, as they belong in the same social group.

The social identity theory highlights brand identification as a significant driver of consumer behaviour, where the attractiveness of the brand's identity is highlighted (Ahearne et al. 2005; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Currás-Pérez et al. 2009). Based on the environmental, animal welfare and health arguments, a vegan can claim to be ethically superior compared to a non-vegan, which makes vegans an attractive social

group. According to Cialdini et al. (1976), associations with attractive social groups lead to significant ego enhancement and positive outcomes. For vegan brands, this offers a strong argument in their favour, as one's self-concept can be verified and maintained by brand associations (Escalas and Bettman 2003), and brands can offer a social group for consumers to categorise and identify themselves with (Elbedweihiy et al. 2016). Furthermore, when the consumers' self-definitional needs (i.e. the need to consume vegan products) are satisfied through brand characteristics and attributes, the brand may receive greater behavioural and attitudinal support from consumers (He, Li & Harris 2012), which three of the four interviewed brands reported receiving.

All interviewed brands aim to offer this social group for vegans (and flexitarians and meat-reducers) to identify with, and to be a part of it themselves. For example, they all utilise environmental issues in their marketing communications, with the aim of making the consumers feel good about themselves by consuming a plant-based product. They are also active in building online brand communities (especially on social media), which they utilise as both a marketing channel and a community-building exercise. Educating the consumer about the benefits of plant-based food and building a brand community are both examples of how vegan brands seek to strengthen CBI.

7.7 Vegan brands' identity and attractiveness

One of the most essential characteristics of a vegan brand is a strong identity, which is firmly based on its values, as was found in the study. Strong identity and value congruence cause brand attractiveness (Elbedweihiy et al. 2016). They are also arguably the most essential reasons behind vegan brands' success. By exclusively producing plant-based food, it can be argued that vegan companies have already taken a firm stance in the debate about environmental issues and animal welfare, regardless of whether they use these factors as a competitive advantage or not. This value-based characteristic is an essential personality trait of the brand, which helps create a strong brand identity, strengthens CBI, distinguishes the brand from other brands that avoid

voicing strong opinions, creates brand loyalty, and enhances its attractiveness (Elbedweihy et al. 2016).

Developing a brand identity around values such as environmental issues and animal welfare helps attract vegan consumers who share these values, as brands tend to have an attractive identity when the consumer's sense of self matches the brand associations (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Consequently, when there is value congruency between a vegan brand and a consumer, the level of CBI is stronger and the consumer is more inclined to express and display the characteristics and values in their self-concept more emphatically and authentically (Dutton et al. 1994). This may explain why three of the interviewed brands reported consumers either voluntarily taking part in debates regarding ethical questions around the brand, or advocating for the brand pro bono. Having a clear value-based identity is also beneficial because it creates coherence (the brand identity character which helps consumers maintain a consistent sense of self), which boosts brand attractiveness (Currás-Pérez, Bigné-Alcañiz & Alvarado-Herrera 2009). This is the case with vegan brands, as to be vegan is to, by definition, to have a clear value-based identity that is distinguishable from others.

Another benefit of a value-based brand identity that consumers find attractive to identify with is that it may result in benefits to the consumer in terms of self-enhancement (Marin, Ruiz & Rubio 2009). In the context of vegan brands, this self-enhancement is the knowledge that the consumer has made an ethical choice in terms of environmental considerations and animal welfare, and the personal health benefits that plant-based food can provide (Evara 2018). According to Currás-Pérez et al. (2009), consumers will feel a motivational impulse to attain a psychological attachment to a brand when they perceive it as attractive and at least partially fulfilling one or more of the fundamental self-definitional needs. The inherent values that the vegan brand possesses first offer a need for the value-congruent consumer to be fulfilled, and then the self-definitional need of the consumer is fulfilled by consuming the brand. In addition, it is noteworthy that consumer-brand relationships based on identification cannot be imposed by companies, as they are selective and volitional acts the consumer makes, based on the self-definitional needs of the consumer, which lead the consumer to identify with the brands they perceive as attractive (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003).

If the consumer, led by self-definitional needs, integrates the brand into the self and profits from the brand in a social and psychological manner, the more likely the consumer is to spend their financial, social and time resources to maintain and nurture the relationship with the brand (Huber et al. 2010). Based on the results of the study, the fact that the vegan brands' consumers often advocate for them and take part in ethical debates in defence of the brand seems to prove that vegans receive self-enhancement from consuming the brand, they have become attached to the brand psychologically, and are willing to nurture their relationship with the brand by spending their resources on it.

7.8 Customer-to-customer similarity

Another important cause for CBI is customer-to-customer similarity (Elbedweihy et al. 2016). Consumers tend to perceive a brand as more attractive when they perceive other users of the brand as similar to themselves (Currás-Pérez et al. 2009; Brocato et al. 2012) and often become attached to the brand when they perceive high similarity to fellow consumers of the brand (Karaosmanoglu et al. 2011). They also tend to evaluate a brand by matching their sense of self together with the brand user image in order to satisfy their need of self-verification (Kressmann et al. 2006), and form connections with brands which they view as associated with reference groups congruent with their concept of self (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Because the vegan claim of ethical superiority is arguably attractive, consumers may want to see themselves belonging to this social group, i.e. be similar to other consumers in the same group. Consequently, they may want to evaluate the vegan brand positively, because they feel as being part of the same social group as they perceive the brand to be in. In other words, they want to match their sense of vegan self with the perceived brand user image of the vegan brand.

All interviewed brands agreed that they already aim to or will aim to take into account consumers' need for self-verification. They do this by trying to create a social group who share the same values, and by having a strong value-based brand identity that value-congruent consumers can identify with, and which belongs to the same social group. In addition, the aforementioned importance of brand communities is only

enhanced by customer-to-customer similarity being an important cause for CBI, because of herd mentality and the ego enhancement effect (Cialdini et al. 1976). This is in line with Keller's (2009) view that relationships among consumers are important, because they affect the main relationship between the consumer and the brand. One brand crystallised the ego enhancement factor and fulfilling the self-definitional need of the consumer by saying "we want to be tied up in somebody's positive sort of self-image".

7.9 The effect of the country's culture vs. vegan culture

It would be logical for vegan brands to accommodate the vegan consumer culture, because culture is paramount for a brand's identity (Kapferer 2012: 159). In addition, an inspiring ideology (which is what veganism aims to be) can keep customers interested long term (Kapferer 2012: 160). Based on the results, the interviewed brands seem to act according to Kapferer's (2012: 159–160) views the most when they operate in their home market, but mostly adjust their strategy in foreign markets.

All interviewed brands felt the local culture of a country they export to influences how the brand is brought into the market, but how they take this into account varies greatly. They have all identified vegans as their core consumers, but at the same time, there is variation in whether they view country culture or vegan culture as more important, and how and if they take the vegan culture into account when entering a new market. By contrast, one of the brands aims to first and foremost accommodate the vegan consumers regardless of which market they are entering, whereas another brand tries to adapt to the local culture without giving any extra attention to vegan consumers (other than simply offering vegan products). The other two brands' approach falls between these two opposites.

Some degree of cultural adaptation will almost inevitably take place, because of cultural necessities, such as language, climate, taste, laws and societies (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 330). One interviewed brand crystallised this view as "getting the cultural relevance right". Their market entries are adaptive in the sense that they gather

and analyse data on local eating patterns, and adjusting their product matrix accordingly. Their approach is to adapt their products to local eating preferences, because in their view, vegans will not learn to use their products if they offer products that do not match cultural preferences of eating and cooking. However, the same brand also maintains their name and visuals in almost every market, which means their approach is a hybrid between adaptation and standardisation, where adaptation is done by adjusting the product matrix while still maintaining the brand name and visuals. This brand is the most global of the four included in the study, which partly explains why they standardise to some extent, as standardisation often occurs on the way of becoming a global company, and is a necessity for becoming a coherent global brand (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 328–330).

Another company included in the study uses private labels in other countries, meaning they only act as the producer and have no real brand presence of their own. In these cases, the decisions are not entirely in the hands of the company, as some markets have restrictions in place for imported goods, which is a common problem for international companies (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 330). Additionally, in some markets it is much more important to present the brand as “organic” rather than “vegan”, or the products may have to be placed in the frozen foods department of the supermarket instead of fresh food. This again is a cultural difference to which an internationalising company will run into (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 330). In these cases, the companies have no choice but to adapt to the local culture by altering the brand for that specific area, as otherwise it will be difficult for the consumers to find the products.

This particular company also reported that in the countries where they use private labels veganism is not as prominent yet as in their home market. In these countries, adaptation may be a feasible compromise in the short-term, as it is likely that veganism will become more popular in the future (according to the company, these markets are typically five years behind Finland in terms of food trends). For companies in this situation, it is an ongoing process where the more they learn about local market characteristics, the more they will be able to establish similarities, which may lead to standardisation of their approach in the market (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 330). As the company internationalises more, and if they aim to develop a coherent brand, it may

be preferable to standardise at least to the extent of having the same brand visuals everywhere, and possibly brand name. The alternative may be that the brand goes into different directions by different silos, and becomes confused and weak (Aaker 2014). To avoid this, centralised coordination is needed across countries and markets (Aaker 2014). Therefore, standardising the brand may be a solution in centralising the coordination of the company.

The third brand has chosen an adaptive approach when entering certain new markets, where they have completely changed the brand name and visuals, and even the product. In their home market the product is a unique meat substitute. However, for the UK and Benelux markets they produce granola made of the same ingredients, meaning the product is completely different, as granola is considered a breakfast food similar to muesli. This approach may be due to cultural differences, as their core product is a new and unique meat substitute, whereas granola is a more traditional breakfast food. Based on this product matrix alteration, it would seem that this brand's international strategy is not to accommodate the vegan culture primarily, as they have decided not to export their core meat substitute product to every market, which would attract vegans first and foremost. Instead, they have decided to have a largely adapted brand presence in these markets by opting to focus on a vegan option for a traditional food, instead of introducing something entirely new. Furthermore, this brand was also adamant about primarily focusing on flexitarians instead of vegans, because they aim to become a brand "for the whole nation", not just vegans. Standardisation is in line with this notion, as it helps save costs as the scale of production increases (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 328).

Judging by this company's replies during the interview, they seem to be in the middle of a changing process regarding the brand strategy. They also mentioned trying to become a more coherent brand internationally, meaning they will eventually decrease the numbers of the "brands within the brand". It should also be noted that they do import their core product into the Nordic markets, albeit with a different brand name and visuals. It would seem this brand wants to leverage its strong brand presence in their home market into other countries as well, by aiming to standardise their brand. The company is quite young, and it would seem that entering new markets with an altered

brand has been a way to get into the marketplace as quickly as possible while at the same time circumventing local barriers, which is normal for an internationalising company (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 330). Going forward, it seems they want to standardise the brand more, as they mentioned wanting to have the same brand name and visuals everywhere. This would be a logical step as it helps international coordination and may lead to a strengthened, international brand (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 328–330; Aaker 2014).

The smallest of the brands has only begun their internationalisation, and so far has not done any cultural adaptation in the markets they have entered. In their view, it is more important to appeal to the vegan consumer culture rather than any specific country's culture, because vegan consumers will form the core group of customers. In other words, their strategy is to standardise the brand. It is a clear distinction between this brand the other three included in the study, as others favoured cultural adaptation or a hybrid between standardisation and adaptation.

This could be explained by the small size and young age of the company, but another essential reason is that their approach differs from others in that they first want to have their product available as a vegan option in fast-food restaurants before they even offer it to grocery stores. Their strategy is to create hype by offering the product to restaurants and helping them in marketing the product. Once the hype is there, it is easier for them to get grocery stores interested.

Having a strategy like this, standardisation possibly makes more sense, because it may be easier to get restaurants involved when the product and brand are the same everywhere. In addition, it may be easier to convince restaurants to offer a vegan meat substitute for products such as kebab and pizza, as those two foods are quite similar regardless of which country or culture the restaurant is located. This would also help consumers who feel their own cooking skills are not on a high enough level to cook vegan food. In general, standardisation helps in economies of scale in production, which would help this company by keeping their processes the same and saving costs (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 328).

Despite this company's current standardisation strategy, it is likely they will have to adapt to some extent in the future, as they have already begun bringing new products into the market, such as vegan slices. Fast-food is very similar everywhere, whereas each country's own food culture differs greatly. The further they develop from being solely a vegan substitute for meat in fast-food restaurants and expand to more consumer-focused products, the more likely it is they will have to adapt, because of cultural differences which may apply more when the consumer is buying a food product which needs to be prepared by themselves, instead of the restaurant. (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 328–330)

Based on the findings, it can be said about vegan brands' international brand development that adaptation will take place eventually, which is in line with Czinkota and Ronkainen's (2007: 330) view that studies show that the majority of products have to be modified for the international marketplace, because in the context of food, cultural preferences necessitate it. Food is often firmly integrated to a country's culture, which is why we call certain food "Italian", "Indian" or "Chinese". Although vegans may share the same values regardless of their nationality, they are still individuals with their country's culture imprinted on them, which leads to diverse eating, cooking and dining habits.

It would seem that as a vegan brand grows and becomes more international, they will eventually have to find a way to adapt to local eating preferences. This can be done by introducing new product categories which reflect a certain eating preference. For example, one of the brands' products are heavily based on a Western European pallet, which means that when they export to Australia, they have to adapt to the Australian lunch culture, because it differs greatly from Western Europe. This is in line with Czinkota and Ronkainen's (2007: 329) view that consumer goods require product adaptation because of cultural grounding, and especially food products tend to have a higher level of adaptation compared to personal care or luxury goods, for example.

As the vegan food industry grows, so will competition among vegan brands. This is why some level of standardisation would be preferable, in order to create longevity in the relationship between the brand and the consumer, and to lower production costs

(Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 328). Two of the interviewed companies have had to adapt to local culture to the extent of changing the brand name and visuals completely, leaving the product itself as the only mutual part of the brand when comparing the brand's presence in foreign markets and in their country of origin. In some cases, even the product offering was completely different. This is because there are certain cultural barriers when entering certain markets, such as the aforementioned restrictions on exported food. It is understandable why these brands have entered these markets even with the restrictions in place, as the vegan food phenomenon has grown steadily and rapidly in the last few years, and there is a profit to be made in almost every market.

However, adaptation to this extent is arguably a short-term solution. In the long run, it may be more sensible for vegan brands to aim to standardise to the extent of keeping the brand's identity in place by having the same visuals and, whenever possible, name. Adaptation could then take place within the product matrix. Alternatively, vegan brands could choose to only enter markets in which they do not have to adapt to the extent of changing everything except the product, and could standardise to some extent. (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 328–330)

7.10 Summary of findings

One of the main findings of the study was that vegan brands are founded firmly on values. In fact, the values are so essential for their brand formation, that it can be said values create the vegan brand's identity. These values include responsibility, environmentalism, animal welfare and simply veganism. Values are also their main success factor, as vegan brands have managed to create and maintain a brand identity which matches the consumers' values. This value congruence has created strong brand resonance between the brand and the consumer, which arguably is the ultimate goal of brand development (Keller 2001). One of the most important ways in which these vegan brands have been able to promote their values and make consumers realise this value congruency, is by educating their consumers about their values by using marketing content which highlights the benefits of a vegan product, such being more

environmentally friendly, lessening animal suffering, and increased personal health. These values also create the basis for these brands' visions, as the overarching theme was to produce plant-based food for everyone while taking environmental issues into account by reducing consumers' dependence on animal agricultures.

Vegan brands also seem to have high levels of brand authenticity, which is also one of their main strengths. The promise of the vegan brands is an ethical and healthier alternative to meat or dairy, produced in an environmentally friendly way. Consumers recognise this value-based way of producing food and embrace it, again because of value congruency. It may also be that consumers prefer these "born vegan" companies over large food chains who have joined in the vegan hype and now also offer vegan products, because vegan companies arguably have more authenticity and credibility. Consumers may perceive it hypocritical if a company offers vegan products at the same time as it uses animal meat in their products. This is the advantage of being a value-based company. Furthermore, the vegan brands aim for transparency regarding their production process, to the extent of informing the consumer who are the farmers who produce the ingredients used in the product.

Vegan brands are also able to engage their brand communities. It was found that these vegan brands are very active on social media, where numerous vegan communities constantly share experiences on new products and exchange ideas on how to cook vegan food. From these communities, the brands gain valuable insights, opinions and ideas for improvement. It should be noted that none of these brands seem to have an exclusive online brand community of their own, but since vegan consumers still make only approximately 1–2% of the population (Kantar TNS 2017; Kantar UK 2017), having an exclusive brand community may not be of importance yet. The interviewed vegan brands have identified young adults as the main consumer segment, which is also the group of people who are most active on Facebook and Instagram (Pew Research Center 2018) – the two most used social media platforms by these brands. Some of the brands also use brand ambassadors to further engage the community. In addition, all interviewed brands participate in the Veganuary challenge in January, which potentially creates a community feeling among those who choose to participate.

It was also found that vegan brands utilise and benefit from being an ethical brand, as ethics is what makes their brand values attractive. However, their approach to ethics differed greatly, as some of them did not even view themselves as an ethical brand. Nevertheless, each brand utilises environmental concerns in their marketing and brand identity, which arguably is an ethical factor. It can be argued that to be a vegan company is to be ethical by definition, because by being environmentally friendly and not using ingredients derived from animals means the company is inherently more ethical than others. Each brand also acknowledged that they have an ethical advantage over non-vegan brands. Some of the brands use ethics in a provocative way or occasionally view their marketing activities as brand activism, whereas some have adopted a positive-only approach regarding their marketing content.

Another main finding was that it would seem the concept of Consumer–Brand Identification does explain why vegan brands have been able to connect with consumers so well, and why the industry is growing rapidly. It is not a coincidence that especially environmental concerns have increased in the past few years, at the same time as the vegan food industry has grown. Vegan consumers have identified with the vegan brands, and flexitarians seem to be doing the same. The reason they do this is because consumers use brands to build their identities (Kapferer 2012: 162). Together, these people share the same values, regardless of whether they strictly follow a vegan diet or not. These people form a social group based on certain values, and vegan brands have been successful in placing themselves within the same group, enabled by value congruence. This is one of the reasons why their CBI is strong.

Another reason why vegan brands' CBI is strong is that a vegan brand is arguably attractive, because of its assumed ethical superiority and concern for the environment. Similarly, the consumer group of vegans, vegetarians and flexitarians is also arguably attractive, for the same reasons. Because of these factors, vegan brands have a strong argument in their favour in terms of attracting consumers who share these values, because of the consumers' self-definitional needs, which can be fulfilled by consuming the brand's products. In other words, consumers want to be a part of this social group who share the aforementioned values, as customer-to-customer similarity is one cause for CBI (Elbedweihy et al. 2016). Becoming a part of this attractive group and using the

brand's products leads to significant ego enhancement for the consumer (Cialdini et al. 1976), and they may evaluate the brand more positively. Furthermore, the brand's attractiveness can be enhanced by having a strong and coherent brand identity (Elbedweihy et al. 2016), which vegan brands have obtained by developing the brand around its values.

More proof of vegan brands' strong CBI was found when the brands reported that their customers often participate in debates on social media, defending the brand pro bono. This type of brand advocacy indicates high engagement from the consumer. This can be explained by the self-enhancement benefit which consumers receive from consuming the brand. It is also proof that vegan brands have been successful in integrating themselves into the self of the consumer, which makes it more likely that the consumer will spend their financial, social and time resources to maintain and nurture the relationship with the brand (Huber et al. 2010).

It was also found that vegan brands have different approaches regarding culture when they begin to internationalise. Most of them see the country's local culture as more important than the vegan culture, even though they all have identified vegans as their core consumers. Only one of the brands wants to focus on vegans first, in order to create a foundation for the brand in a new market.

Those brands that view local culture as more important than vegan culture, aim to adapt the brand and its products to match cultural eating preferences. Some of these brands have had to enter new markets with a completely altered brand name, visuals and sometimes even product, due to restrictions on exported goods. These are obstacles an internationalising company faces, but in the long-term, having a coherent brand presence everywhere may be a more feasible option, especially as it helps to save costs (Czinkota and Ronkainen 2007: 328–330).

Despite the fact that most of the vegan companies have decided to adapt to the local culture, they also have several standardised elements in their presence in international markets as well. For example, one of the brands only alters their product matrix to accommodate to the local food culture, but aims to maintain the same brand visuals and

name everywhere. Similarly, another brand wants to decrease the number of “brands within the brand” and by doing so become more a more coherent brand internationally. To conclude, a hybrid between cultural adaptation and brand-related standardisation may be the most feasible option for vegan brands as they internationalise more, because it would allow them to accommodate the local eating habits while maintaining a coherent brand presence internationally.

8 CONCLUSION

This final chapter is a summary of the whole work – what the purpose was and where did it lead. It is a reflection on the research questions, how they were answered and what can be analysed from them. Limitations of the study are also discussed. In addition, further research is suggested.

The aim of this study was to find reasons for the emergence of the vegan food industry, and to analyse how vegan brands develop their brand, whether the Consumer–Brand Identification concept explains the success of vegan brands, and how culture effects the internationalisation of vegan brands. To do this, the vegan food industry was researched and the main concepts of brand development were introduced. In addition, the CBI concept was introduced in depth. This theoretical framework was used to formulate questions for the four vegan brands that were then interviewed, including questions about their brand’s identity and values. The brands were also asked questions to find whether they utilise or benefit from CBI in their brand development and marketing activities. Finally, they were asked about the importance and effects of culture on brand-related decisions when internationalising, including both the local country’s culture and the vegan consumer culture.

The interview data was then put through a thematic analysis to find recurring themes and to organise the data into a comparable format. The data was then compared and analysed to find similarities and differences between the brands. These similarities and differences were then analysed in the chapter about research results. Lastly, the results and findings of the study were discussed and analysed in relation to the theoretical framework introduced in the earlier chapters of the study.

Based on the analysis on the interview data and theory, it was found that vegan brands mainly develop their brand identity around their values of responsibility, environmentalism, animal welfare, healthiness and veganism. A strong and coherent value-based identity is their main strength as a brand, which leads to high levels of brand authenticity and brand resonance with consumers. Ethics is also one of their strengths, but differences regarding the utilisation of ethics were found, as some brands

aim to leverage it to their advantage, while others have adopted a positive-only approach where they take no part in ethical debates directly.

A main finding of the study was that the CBI concept (Elbedweihiy et al. 2016) seems to explain well the success of vegan brands. Vegan brands have managed to develop an attractive and strong brand identity for vegan (and flexitarian) consumers to identify with. As environmental concerns have grown and more attention has been given to animal welfare, consumers have adopted certain values, which the vegan brands share with them. This value congruence between the brand and the consumer is the main reason why vegan brands have become successful. Consumers also have self-definitional needs such as being vegan, which they can fulfil by consuming a vegan brand that has managed to place itself within the same social group as the consumer, which is another success factor of vegan brands. Together, vegans and vegan brands form a social group which is arguably attractive, due to their assumed ethical superiority. Being a part of this social group can lead to ego enhancement for the consumer, as customer-to-customer similarity is a cause for CBI.

Finally, the importance and effects of a local country's culture and vegan consumer culture when internationalising were analysed, and it was found that even within a small industry, there are considerable differences. All brands included in the study have identified vegans as their core consumers, yet only one of them focuses on them primarily when entering a new market. All other brands aim to adapt to local country's culture to various degrees, in order to accommodate cultural eating preferences. In some cases, vegan brands have had to enter new markets under a private label, meaning they only act as the producer. Based on the results, it was suggested that some degree of standardisation would be preferable in the future when the vegan brands' internationalisation accelerates.

8.1 Success of the study

The main aim of the study was to find how vegan brands develop their brand. This question has successfully been answered, based on the theoretical framework on brand development, the brand identity objective and the findings on the value-based brand identity formation of the brands. CBI was also introduced and another aim of the study was to analyse whether the concept explains the success of vegan brands. Based on the findings gathered from the interview data with the vegan brands, this question has seemingly been successfully answered, as the concept seems to explain the value-based relationship between value-conscious vegan and flexitarian consumers and the value-based vegan brands.

To find and analyse the effects of culture on vegan brands' internationalisation was another aim of the study. It would seem this question has also been answered, as several similarities and differences were discovered in the vegan brands' approach to international brand development, although some of these differences could be explained with the varying size, age, and internationalisation stage of the companies. In addition, the vegan food phenomenon itself was researched and several background factors were introduced, including ethical and environmental concerns, as well as health factors. Together, these explain what the emergence of the vegan food industry is rooted on.

To conclude, the research questions were mainly answered. The introduced theories seem to explain the brand development and CBI of vegan brands well. As not much research has been done on vegan companies, some new information and insights were gained about vegan brands' brand development. However, the findings of the study should be considered as preliminary at best.

8.2 Limitations of the research

First of all, because there were only four companies included in the study, the results cannot be generalised to a large extent, even within the vegan food industry. This is

because of the low number of companies involved, but also because three of the four companies were Finnish, which leads to certain markets receiving the main focus. Furthermore, the age, size and stage of internationalisation between the companies varies greatly. The largest of them is a true global company, while the smallest has only begun entering new markets. In addition, the product range of the companies varies, which means the companies with the lowest number of products may not be able to enter certain markets because of cultural barriers, which leads to differing answers on some of the interview questions. In hindsight, it would have been preferable to include companies with less variation in terms of size, age and stage of internationalisation. However, including certain companies is not entirely in the hands of the author of the study. Overall, the study is merely a cursory glance into the brand development of vegan brands, from which some rough indications may be obtained, but more thorough studies are needed to properly verify the findings of this study.

8.3 Further research

As was found in the chapter on the vegan food industry, the vegan food phenomenon has grown rapidly, and it seems to be here to stay. This alone makes the topic worth further research. However, what makes it an even more important research topic is the growing concern for climate change and the growing population. In the future, there will be more people to feed, but at the same time, more and more research is confirming that humans accelerate climate change, which will lead to various problems on a global scale. The vegan food industry offers a solution to both of these issues, as plant-based food is less damaging to the environment, and humans eating plants circumvents the major issue of misallocation of food, i.e. instead of first feeding plants to animals to produce meat for humans to eat, humans eat the plants. Because of these factors, there is reason to believe the vegan food industry will continue its growth in the future, and when that happens, more research should follow as well.

In addition, and to the best knowledge of the author of this paper, there has not been much research on vegan food companies. The phenomenon itself has been studied to

some extent, but this mostly means consumer surveys on the changing attitudes and behaviour regarding food consumption, or veganism from a nutritional standpoint. Vegan companies offer an interesting topic to study, because of the aforementioned growth of the industry in the past few years, but also because they are unique in the sense that they by definition voice their opinion about ethics. It could be argued that by taking an ethical stance as vegan companies do, they are already making a greater impact on society ethically, environmentally and from a health point of view than any Corporate Social Responsibility act that companies often execute. Because of this impact on society, environment and health, vegan companies make for an interesting and current topic to study. It would also seem that values are the main drivers for the high level of Consumer–Brand Identification which seems to be evident when vegan brands and their relationship with their consumers is under review. Value-based businesses are not new, but when the global effects of following a plant-based diet are brought into the conversation, it arguably makes researching vegan companies even more important in the future.

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10 APPENDIX

Interview questions used in the semi-structured interviews.

BASIC INFORMATION

How many people does the company currently employ?

In how many countries does the company operate in?

Is the company exclusively vegetarian/vegan?

BRAND

Brand identity

How would you describe the company's brand identity and where does it come from?

How do you try to build the brand's identity?

Brand vision / Ideal

What is your company's brand vision / ideal?

How do you try to reach the vision?

Brand authenticity

How important is the brand's authenticity to you?

Would you agree that for a vegetarian food company the brand's authenticity is vital?

How do you aim to be an authentic brand?

Brand culture

How would you describe your company's brand culture?

Externally, what message do you aim to convey about your culture to the consumers, if any?

Moral / ethical brand

Do you consider the brand to be a moral brand and in what way?

Do you try to turn its values into an advantage? How?

Marketing content & channels

How do all of these things - Identity, Vision, Authenticity, Culture, Morals, Values - show in your marketing content?

What marketing channels do you use?

Why have you these channels?

Competitors

Who do you consider to be your competitors more, other companies in the vegan food industry or the meat industry? Why?

VALUES

What are your brand's values?

Do these values simply come from your views, or are they aligned with the consumers' values on purpose?

How important is it for your brand that the values are congruent with customers?

How do you try to appeal to the values of the consumer?

CONSUMERS

Brand resonance

Who have you identified as the brand's customers? (Vegetarians/Vegans/Flexitarians)

Do you differentiate between vegan / vegetarian consumers and omnivores who want to reduce their meat consumption? If yes, how?

What do you do to make the brand resonate with customers?

Consumer–Brand Identification

Consumers tend to identify with brands they feel are similar to the social groups they are part of. Is this something you take into account while developing your brand? How?

What is this social group you try to make the brand similar to?

Customer-to-customer similarity

What kind of a social group have you identified as your customers?

How specifically do you try to connect your brand with your customers?

Do you aim to utilise the "herd mentality" of your customers in your brand development? How?

For example, do you try to get people involved on social media? How?

CULTURE & INTERNATIONAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT

Do you take a country-specific approach in your brand development or marketing activities? Why?

How does the culture in other countries affect brand development?

In terms of international brand development, would you say it is more important for you to appeal to the vegan consumer culture, rather than any specific country's culture? Why?

Would you say that when comparing the effects of a country's culture and the culture of the vegan community, it is the vegan community that is more important in terms of brand development?

Were you to expand into new countries, would you mostly focus your branding for vegan consumers?

Are you planning to expand to more countries in the near future?